

## THE FELLOWSHIP

An Exposition of First John

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CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CRUSADE Fort Washington, Pennsylvania

### CHAPTER EIGHT -

#### THE PRACTICALITY OF THE FELLOWSHIP

I John 3:10-18

**10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.**

**11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.**

**12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.**

**13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.**

**14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.**

**15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.**

**16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**

**17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?**

**18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.**

CHRISTIANITY is so intensely practical. It never allows us to forget that if it does not "**work**" it is spurious. "**Faith without works is dead**," (James 2:26). Not that works are the cause of salvation, but they are the consequence of it, as Paul is led to tell us, in a classic passage, "**Saved . . . not of works . . . unto good works**," (Ephesians 2:8-10).

At the end of his birthday a small boy was a-bed when an uncle came in with a belated present - a clockwork engine. How pleased was the little fellow, and how eager for the morning, when he could see how it worked! That is one of the special blessings of Monday Morning - Sunday has brought you some special blessing, and next day is your first chance to see that it works.

"**Shew forth His salvation from [Mon-] day to [Satur-] day**", says Psalm 96:2. "**Work out your own salvation**", says Philippians 2:12 - "**your own**", because you received it from Him, and now, by His indwelling, He enables you to work it out in practice.

In the section before us, Paul takes up certain subjects which he has already dealt with - righteousness, love, sacrifice, kindness. Only now, he treats them, not theoretically, not I emotionally, not doctrinally - but practically. I remind you of what we saw in 1:6, where our apostle speaks of those who "**do not the truth**". You see, truth is not merely something to be believed, something to be preached, but something to be done. All doctrine ends in done. On, then, to our verses.

## RIGHTEOUSNESS IN ACTION

Throughout the New Testament, there is always this insistence on the practical. Colossians 2:6 - "**As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him**" - we are to walk what we talk. Romans 1:7 - "**Called to be saints**" - we are to be what we are. John 13:17 - "**If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them**" - we are to do what we know. Matthew 7:21 - "**not everyone that saith . . . but he that doeth**"; Matthew 23:3 - "**they say, and do not**" - we are to practice what we say. So we are not surprised to find the same emphasis in this 10th verse - "**whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God**". We are not only to be righteous, but to do righteousness.

Herein lies one of the great differentiations between "**the children of God**" and "**the children of the devil**". Whatever a man professes, if you find that he neglects the doing of righteous acts, the walking in righteous ways, you have every right to assume that he is not a righteous man, not a Christian.

He may be one, of a very poor and unsatisfactory sort, but there is no evidence of it; and as "**by their fruits ye shall know them**" it is more than likely that they are not "**trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord**", Isaiah 61:3, at all, however beautiful their "**leaves**", Matthew 21:19, of profession may be.

"**Manifest**", therefore, the reality of your testimony by the fruits of good living, "**that He might be glorified**", as the Isaiah verse finishes.

But there is here something very striking.

*There is not only one class of people* - as is asserted so often, in a certain circle, who say that we are all GOD's children. Here, in the inspired record, is plain division and distinction drawn, through the ranks of human society, "**children of God**" and "**children of the devil**". Paul had inferred the same thing years before, when he described the condition of those who were then Christians as having "**in time past**" been "**children of disobedience**", and "**children of wrath**" (Ephesians 2:2-3), before they became, by New Birth, "**children of GOD**."

Indeed, did not the Saviour Himself accuse His adversaries, "**Ye are of your father the devil**", (John 8:44)?

Note next that:

*There are not three classes of people* as if, not belonging to either of the two divisions, there were some middle-of-the-road position, a kind of neutrality. Hebrews 2:3, "**How shall we escape**

**if we neglect so great salvation**", should suffice to guard anyone from resting upon such a supposition. Those who reject shall not escape; but to neglect is, in effect, the same thing - for in either case we have not got it. One commentator on this Epistle, has drawn attention to the fact that "John divides the world sharply into two classes. Looking at the spiritual characteristics of life he admits no intermediate class. For him there is only light and darkness, and no twilight. He sees only life and death." May we venture to add - only white or black; no gray.

Thank GOD,

*There is a choice of class for all people.*

In the field of life there are only wheat and tares, and the latter can never have change of heart and nature to grow into the former category. They must remain unalterably, inexorably, the same **"until the harvest"**, Matthew 13:30, of Barn, or Burning.

But what is impossible in the natural world IS gloriously possible in the spiritual realm.

Though born, as we all are, into the bad family, as Psalm 2:5 will not allow us to forget, we can be born again into the good Family and Fellowship of GOD. Only remember that anyone whose life is not set to do righteously is manifestly not of GOD.

## LOVE IN ACTION

*Love is more than an emotional thing* - it is intensely motional, especially in that highest form of it of which Paul speaks in II Corinthians 5:14, **"The love of Christ constraineth us"**: such love urged him on to **"do exploits"**, Daniel 11:32. Love must do something, must give, in costly measure. Was it not so with GOD Himself - **"For God so loved . . . that He gave . . ."**, John 3:16.

*Love is a fundamental thing* - **"This is the message that ye heard from the beginning"** (11). Though so little grasped, it is in reality one of the first, basic lessons in the Primary Division of the School of CHRIST - like "A.B.C.", or "Twice Two are Four", in the ordinary school. From the very beginning of their discipleship, as one of the First Steps in Christian Life Grammar, they had been instructed **"that we should love one another"**.

And that is the case with all who have ever entered His school at all - as Paul puts it in another connection. **"If so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him"**, (Ephesians 4:21). And is not that apostle saying the same thing when he writes, **"Learn first to shew piety at home"**, (I Timothy 5:4). **"Piety"** there is love in action, and it is to be one of the priorities of Christian behaviour - it is a fundamental. It is an old Lesson, which has been taught to scholars ever since the School was opened, and newly taught to every new boy, or new girl, ever since, 2:7-8.

*Love is a natural thing* - as between brethren. That is an unnatural family in which the boys are constantly quarrelling, and even thoroughly disliking each other. So it was with Cain (12).

He couldn't stand young Abel, the "good boy" of the household, while he was the "bad lad".

Really nasty people often hate really nice people - "because" their very excellences show up their own depravities. How Judas hated JESUS. This is why real, all-out Christians should "**marvel not... if the world hate you**" (13).

What we should be surprised at is to find Christian "**brethren**" acting in an unbrotherly way towards their fellows. Alas, alas, alas - a not uncommon thing - in many congregations. "**Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?**" (Acts 7:26). Yes, Moses knew right, and spake true. It is, indeed, a natural thing that we Christians should show a mutual affection - not only by avoiding wrongdoing to all, but by seeking well-being of each.

*Love is a practical thing* - as this whole passage so clearly and so constantly underlines. The fact of this frequent stress shows what importance GOD, the HOLY SPIRIT, attaches to it. Though there is high and deep sentiment in love, it is not merely sentimental. The true assessment of its quality lies, not in what we say, but in what it leads us to do.

Take this, for example - "**If ye love Me, keep My commandments**", (John 14:15.) If we really love anyone their wish is a command; and we may say of them as this Epistle says of the LORD, "**His commandments are not grievous**", (I John 5:3).

A stranger met a small girl carrying her little brother and said, "What a burden you've got there." To which the child replied, "This isn't a burden, it's my brother."

A load gladly borne, almost bereft of weight, because she loved. That is love's way.

*Love is an evidential thing* - the possession of it will indicate for us something of very great importance, which it will cause us to "**know**". Do you want to know whether you have passed from death to life? Here is one mark by which you may test yourself - "**because we love the brethren**" (3:14).

This is not the cause of the translation, but a sign of it. It is not without significance that, before "**death**" and "**life**", the Greek of the phrase, has a definite article in each case.

It is not ordinary death that is meant, but "**the**" death - that which entered into human experience at Eden, and whose dread entail has since become part of the very being of us all, the make-up of our human personality. "**As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men . . .**", (Romans 5:12). It is that particular kind of death which characterizes, and stigmatizes, every unregenerate soul as being "**dead in trespasses and sins**", (Ephesians 2:1). It is that state which, unrepented of, is the prelude of eventual and eternal "**second death**", (Revelation 20:14).

Ay, but there is a blessed alternative - "**the**" life: that special species so often described as "**eternal life**," and of which the Master was thinking when He said, "**I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly**", (John 10:10). Well now, have we been transferred from that death to that life? Here's a simple test by which we may "**know**" - Love!

Incidentally, it is also the evidence, the test, by which the world may "**know**" where we stand -

**"By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another"**, (John 13:35). So we observe that, on top of everything else, this practical love has great evidential value - to our own hearts, and to the estimate of others.

## SACRIFICE IN ACTION

Here, indeed, is love at its highest - to the limit of an active self-sacrifice. Two persons, as it were, are involved in the narrative - "**He**", and "**We**" (16).

*His Example is Paramount* - "**Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us.**" This is not the expiatory aspect of His death - in that we could never have a part - but the exemplary aspect of it. We might, not unprofitably, stay a moment at that word "**for**" in this verse. In connection with the relationship to us of His atoning death, two quite different Greek prepositions are translated "**for**", and they have entirely distinct meanings.

To illustrate, look at these two seemingly contrary verses - (1) "**Who gave Himself a ransom for all**", (I Timothy 2:6). (2) "**To give His life a ransom for many**", (Matthew 20:28). Well, which is it: all, or many?

As so often in Scripture with apparently contradictory statements, the answer is, Both; and the solution lies in the different prepositions used in the original. The first "**for**" means: on behalf of - indeed, He died on behalf of all. The second "**for**" means: instead of - in very truth, He died instead of many, not of all.

One of the teachings that the devil hates is this doctrine of what is known as the Substitutionary Atonement. Alas, there are many preachers to-day who reject it. Whereas it seems to me that the Bible is shot through with it. But - do you see the distinction between the two "**for**"?

Let us take a simple illustration. A half-dozen people, non-swimmers, are fallen into the sea, and are in peril of drowning in the dangerously rough waves.

A man, at grave risk to himself, gets a boat out. By prodigious efforts, he manages to haul two into the boat and take them to safety. On going back, exhausted, for others, he is himself engulfed in the waters, giving his life on behalf of all six, but instead of the two - the four lost their own lives, his was not given instead of theirs, though on behalf of them. Is that clear?

In our verse, the preposition is "**on behalf of**" us. In the second half of the verse we have a corollary.

*His Expectation is Clear* - "**we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren**". Not, of course, in dying for them, as He did on the Cross, but in living for them, as He did in His life.

There is a further interesting grammatical point arising here. He "**laid down**" is in the Greek tense which signifies that it was done once for all, at a specific moment, as is so abundantly clear throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews - as, for instance, in 10:12, "**after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God**", as token that the sacrifice was complete: in His own word, "**Finished**", John 19:30.

All that talk in certain circles about "the re-offering of the sacrifice" at Communion time is entirely unwarranted, in the face of Holy Scripture.

When we turn, in our verse, to we "**lay down**", we find a different Greek tense, the present, which signifies, not a "once for all" transaction, but a continual process.

Our minds go at once to the challenging words of Romans 12:1 - "**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of GOD, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice . . .**". His mercies exhibited in His laying down His in death for us is to be the motive, the incentive, to our laying down our bodies in life for others.

The figure is drawn, of course, from the Old Testament sacrifice of the Burnt Offering, the only one of the five in which everything was offered, nothing being kept back. Our offering of ourselves is to be exactly like that, with the one exception, that, whereas they became dead sacrifices, ours is to be a living sacrifice - a complete laying out of our lives in the service of GOD, and of "**the brethren**".

And that brings us on naturally to the last thought in this passage.

### **KINDNESS IN ACTION**

Here is love in homespun - the doing of the little things, the giving of the cup of cold water in His Name, Matthew 10:42, the small touches that can mean so much. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that kindness can be a great evangelizing agency - you say you can't work, you can't speak; well, can you be kind? A smile, a word, a touch - such things can be as seeds, which, in many an instance, have produced a golden harvest in a truly converted soul: the first impression having been made, the first inclination aroused, by some simple act of kindness. Wherefore, "**be ye kind one to another**", (Ephesians 4:32). Perhaps that would be a good way of beginning to win your next-door neighbour to GOD?

First, then, *we have The Need* - "**his brother have need**" (17). It is one of the many lovely characteristics of the Master that need was so powerful a magnet, drawing Him alongside - water couldn't keep Him away, Matthew 14:25; bolted doors couldn't bar His coming, John 20:19; in an earlier day, fire couldn't prevent His approach to them, Daniel 3:25, and "**this same Jesus**", living and loving as of yore, is drawn by our need.

But the point of this passage is, are we so drawn, for there is plenty of need around. "We couldn't care less" is, unfortunately, the attitude of many from their own selfish ease and comfort. Needs of body, needs of heart, needs of mind, needs of circumstance, needs of soul - well, what about it?

We have here, next, *The Heed* - "**whoso . . . seeth**". There is a certain force about that verb as if to suggest something more than a mere, casual, passing glance, registering nothing particular in the observer's mind-like the "**certain priest**" in the Immortal Parable, Luke 10:31. The victim is shown as "**stripped... wounded... and... half-dead**": need indeed. But this was nothing to the reverend gentleman, he never gave it a second thought.

I used to think that, going to his duties in the Temple at Jerusalem, he was afraid that contact with this seemingly dead body would ceremonially disqualify him from his priestly duties, which would have been the case - until I noted that he was not going up, but that he "**came down**", his term of office was done, Luke 1:8. He just didn't care: that was all, he took no heed of desperate need.

It was different, possibly worse, with the Levite following. He did take the trouble to cross the road, and have a good look at him, but he did nothing either - "poor fellow", he would say, sentimentally, as he "**passed by**". Well, do you know anything about that kind of attitude to need?

So our verse carries on to suggest *The Deed* - not commending the "**shutteth up bowels of his compassion**", but rather hinting at the reverse, and, as it were, applauding the wholehearted deed of the Good Samaritan, who "**when he saw him, he had compassion on him**". Unknown, as he was; unattractive, as he must have looked; unremunerative, as he was perforce bound to be; unfriendly, as "**the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans**", John 4:9 - yes, he had plenty of reasons for passing by on the other side.

So had our Saviour, the *Ideal of the Good Samaritan*, Who "**when we were yet without strength . . . while we were yet sinners . . . when we were enemies,**" died to save us, Romans 5:6, 8, 10. It was not as if the man in our Epistle was in no position to help, for he "**hath this world's good**" - he could, but would not.

A certain "sermon-taster" had heard that a celebrated preacher was to be in a local church; but, not knowing which one, he spent most of the service time going unsuccessfully from place to place. At last he reached his target, with the great name placarded outside. As he approached, they were singing, and anxiously he wondered whether it was the hymn before or after. Putting his head inside the door, he asked someone, "Is the sermon done?" To which he obtained the suggestive reply, "No, it's got to be done." We hope it is not irreverent to hazard the view that that story would greatly have appealed to the New Testament writer who said, "**Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only**", James 1:22.

After all, the concluding verse of this section (18) sums up the whole matter of the practicality of the Fellowship when it says, "**My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.**"

So be it!

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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