

LIFE, LOVE and LIGHT

The Gospel of John and First Epistle of John

By

Norman B. Harrison, D.D.
Pastor, Bible Teacher and Evangelist

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CHAPTER NINE

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

"Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:13)

As in a great musical production there are certain dominant strains that convey to the listener's ear the master's motif, yet they in turn are supported by an accompaniment that equally expresses the master's theme, so in our Epistle. Light and Love are its dominant notes, expressive of our experience of GOD, yet back of them is always the supporting thought of Life, without which Light and Love could not be.

The theme of the Apostle, as we have seen, is the Abiding Life, the life that is ours this side of Pentecost, the life in the Spirit. The Epistle begins by referring to the Life as manifested in CHRIST the Son (vv. 1, 2) and proceeds to trace that Life in its correspondent manifestation in us who, by believing upon Him, become sons and receive His Spirit. Just as, technically speaking, energy expresses itself as light and heat, so in the things of the Spirit. The life will show itself as light, rather than darkness; as love, rather than hatred. And as light and heat are impossible apart from energy, so the life is the basis, the key to all Christian experience.

Moreover, Light and Love are not the only expressions of Life. It has its own essential, inalienable attributes, characteristics that must come into their own if Christian experience is to be fully rounded out and Christian service be truly Christian in quality and achievement.

I Life at Its Source

John records the teaching of JESUS: **"God is Spirit"** (John 4:24), that is, Life in the absolute, in its essence, pure and unconditioned by anything outside itself.

1. **IT IS ETERNAL.** And when we speak of **"Eternal Life"** we are referring not merely to

duration but to quality. Life in GOD does not end because it is unending; it has nothing in it that could cease to be. When JESUS says: "**I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish,**" He is stating the fact that salvation is the impartation of the divine nature, which is life; and that life is necessarily eternal-GOD has no other kind or quality of life to give. The enemy of life, death, has no power over it; there is nothing in it to "**perish.**"

2. **IT IS TRUE**, to the exclusion of all error and untruth. JESUS gives to the third person of the Trinity the name, "**Spirit of Truth.**" Wholly truth, in His very being, so foreign to the spirit of the world, that it cannot receive Him, does not see Him and does not know Him; yet to believers receiving Him, He ministers truth, leading and guiding them into it (John 14:17; 16:13). So John sets the "**Spirit of Truth**" over against the "**spirit of error**" (I John 4:6).

3. **IT IS HOLY**. Holiness is an essential attribute of Life in GOD. It is, by nature, separate from everything unclean. Nothing that contaminates could by any possibility touch it or fasten itself upon it. Its very essence makes it a thing apart. It is with this in view that the Apostle makes the clear-cut separation between sin and sinlessness, tracing the one to its source, "of the devil," and the other to the fact that we have been begotten with the sinless life and nature of GOD.

II Life as Experienced in Us

The Life that is in GOD, and was manifest in the Word made flesh, now entrusts itself to us, seeking our hearts as its habitat. It goes without saying that the business of those receiving the Life is to see that, so far as possible, it is in us as it is in Him. In order that Light and Love may do their purifying, beautifying and transforming work, they must be sustained by a vital, vigorous Bow of Life. In fact, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the secret of all true Christian experience is a constant appropriating of Life from the Source. As experienced in us:

1. **LIFE IS A BEGETTING**. We do not grow into life. We do not struggle for it. We cannot buy it. We possess it as any child-by being born. We are begotten of GOD, born of the Spirit. As JESUS taught Nicodemus, this New Birth is the one and only doorway into the Kingdom.

Throughout the Epistle, some eight times, the form of address constantly used is "**Little children.**" It is a reminder to all, young and old alike, of our New Birth.

We are the "born ones" of GOD; as the Scotch put it, His "bairns." This means, and it is the invariable viewpoint of this Epistle, that we are possessed of GOD's life and nature, members of His family. In consequence the appeal of this Epistle for Christian living is the most tender to be found anywhere - it is merely our filial duty, as the children of our Father.

2. **LIFE IS AN ANOINTING**. As believers we have an anointing from the Holy One (I John 2:20), which becomes an inward, personal teaching (vs. 27), serving to fortify us against the wiles and seductions of false doctrine. In other words, the Spirit who imparted to us the life of GOD also endowed us with the mind of GOD. The result is a spirit of discernment that detects the "**antichrists**" that characterize this "last time" (vs. 18), people who turn aside from the truth, deny the Deity of CHRIST and pervert the plain way of life (vv. 19-21).

How gracious of our GOD, in view of the false systems of our day, to provide such an anointing as a surety against false beliefs with all their plausible seductions. "**The sheep follow Him: for they know His voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.**" In the light of this teaching it may well be doubted whether those who are led away by the errors of one Russell, Mrs. Eddy, etc., ever were born again, else they would have the anointing that discerns the error. John reasons: "**If they had been of us, they would have remained with us.**"

3. **LIFE IS AN ASSURING.** One of the most significant words in this entire Epistle is "**know.**" It occurs thirty-seven times. The Gospel was written that we might "**have life**"; the Epistle, that we might "**know that we have life**" (John 20:31; I John 5:13). Life in the Spirit is conducive to a knowledge that is more positive and immediate than mere reassuring. It goes deeper than the head; it is of the heart. This knowledge is a consciousness of truth and reality, wrought as a conviction in the soul. Just as I have an inherent consciousness, which is far more than knowledge gleaned from a birth record, that I am my father's son, so is the assurance ministered by the Spirit to those who live a life of abiding in Him.

To go through these "**knows**" of the Apostle of Assurance will bring rich returns in the coin of heavenly confidence.

- Not only do we know Him; "**we know that we know Him.**"
- Not only have we passed from death unto life; "**we know that we have passed from death unto life.**"
- Not only are we of the truth; "**we know that we are of the truth.**"
- Not only does He abide in us; "**we know that He abideth in us.**"
- Not only do we dwell (abide) in Him; "**we know that we dwell in Him.**"
- Not only do we have eternal life; "**we know that we have eternal life.**"
- Not only does GOD hear prayer; "**we know that He hears us.**"
- Not only are we of GOD; "**we know that we are of God.**"

III

Life as Expressed through Us

The responsibility for letting the Life find expression through us, His children, is clear and conclusive. John reasons it thus: "**Because as He is, we also are in this world.**" Note the "**also**" - it is the Apostle's favorite phrase for linking our living with our Lord's in inescapable responsibility.

He came in the flesh, that the Life might be manifested through Him. Now He has given us His Spirit that we also, possessed of the same Life, may show forth its essential character. It should be equally clear, as the very ABC of Christian living, that the possibility of acquitting ourselves for such a high responsibility lies in freely drawing upon the Life at its Source, letting it have its unhindered way in us, then passing it on to our fellows. But how shall we give such Life its rightful expression through us?

1. **LIFE IS A FELLOWSHIP FAMILYWARD.** In this Epistle we find ourselves in the bosom of a family - the family of GOD. We are brothers each to the other. It is in this intimate

association of the twice-born children of GOD that Christian living finds its foremost sphere of duty - people of whatever natural diversity, yea even antipathy, demonstrating their kinship in CHRIST, living in "**fellowship one with another**," loving one another with the very love of GOD, all the outbreathing of the indwelling Spirit. No apologetic for the Christian faith is more greatly needed today than that of a new reality in the bond of life and love among GOD's people. For this the world waits to be convinced.

2. **LIFE IS A WITNESS WORLDWARD.** In the fifth chapter of the Epistle, ten times in five verses occurs the Greek word for "**witness**" (albeit in its different uses as the Authorized Version provides).

"**It is the Spirit that beareth witness.**" He is the great witnesser, bearing witness through the Word concerning the Son and the way of life through Him. This witness, when we have believed it, makes our own salvation sure to us. But this witness does not terminate upon us; rather, through us who have received it is it to be given to the world.

Nor is our witness less of life than of lips. The truth of it is to be seen as much as heard. Thus the whole teaching of the Epistle, its appeal that we walk as He walked and love as He loved, is crystallized in the practical demand that the Christian live a testimonial life before the world, commending His salvation by its evident power to transform and satisfy. This furnishes one more angle of appeal, added to all that has gone before, calling the child of GOD to a life of separation. If the love of the world still grips his heart, leaving him unchanged both inwardly and outwardly, how can he convince that world of the worth of his faith?

3. **LIFE IS A BOLDNESS GODWARD.** Twice the Apostle turns to the Godward expression of our life in prayer. Both times he employs this word, "**confidence**" or "**boldness toward God**" (I John 3:21; 5:14). Both times, also, there is an "**if**" conditioning our success in prayer. The ability to approach GOD with boldness depends upon the life that is back of the praying. It must be a life that leaves us with an uncondemning heart, conscious that its uppermost desire is to "**keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.**"

When we were younger in the Christian life, in our eagerness to please Him we set about to catalog His commandments with a view to keeping them, as the key to our confidence toward Him. But in so doing we were overlooking the fact that, to save us from all bondage to legalism, in the next verse He proceeds to give the epitome of His commandments:

"**And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment**" (I John 3:23).

Believing on the Name, than which there is none other, we have life from GOD and become members of the family of GOD. Loving one another (and "**love is the fulfilling of the law**") we live as members of the family. How simple it sounds! And it is. Such a life abides in Him, is well pleasing to Him, has boldness toward Him. When we maintain the line of communication, unbroken at any point, we can approach GOD with the confidence of children coming to their Father; and as we wait there in His presence with supreme desire that all self-will should be set aside for His supremely perfect will, "**we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him**" (I John 5:15). Nor does this privileged prayer-life terminate upon ourselves; it is

quickly turned into the channel of intercession for others, chief of all for the members of the family of faith (vs. 16; cf. Ephesians 6:18, 19).

The Christlike Life

This is the only life that tells, for it is the only life that GOD can use. All that savors of the flesh, all sin and unbelief, all that partakes of darkness, all hatred or lack of love, all conformity to the Christ-refusing world - these He cannot use. But, blessed be GOD, He has given us His Spirit for this very purpose, that He might free us from bondage to all such and bring us out into the liberty of the sons of GOD, even to a life of conformity to His own Son.

This is the life that tells.

Not merely is it better to live for Him than to work for Him; it is the only way, without which we cannot work for Him. There is no substitute. It is His own life in us that He uses.

This incident comes to us from the mission field:

A man was about to be recalled because of apparent inability to meet certain conditions of language, etc. But his fellow-workers protested, saying, "Please do not recall him, for his life makes up for all our talking."

Were we able fully to abide in Him that He might perfectly abide in us; could our lives reveal only CHRIST and others see "**no man, save Jesus only**" - such a life on the part of GOD's people would deliver a spiritual shock that would startle this old world out of its age-long unbelief.

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