

## THE FELLOWSHIP

An Exposition of First John

by Guy H. King

Copyright @ 1954

CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CRUSADE Fort Washington, Pennsylvania

### CHAPTER SIX - THE PORTRAITS OF THE FELLOWSHIP

I John 3:1-3

**1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.**

**2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.**

**3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself. even as he is pure.**

MOST of the scholars are agreed that the two main sections and subjects of this Epistle are:

(a) 1-2: Light; (b) 3-5: Love.

Which being so, we shall find the prevailing emphasis of these three chapters is on this second Attribute of GOD, and Requirement of His people. It is striking to note that within the compass of these sixty-six verses, the Noun occurs sixteen times, the Adjective five times, the Verb twenty-five times. Love is indeed the theme; and as love is so strangely violated by so many in the Fellowship, this portion of the Word may carry much blessing as we study it together. I hope I shall not be held too facile, or too fanciful, in suggesting that these present verses give us an essay in Christian portraiture. It is one resemblance that we see, taken from three angles.

#### THE FAMILY LIKENESS

**"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of GOD"**

(1). GOD doesn't call every man a son of GOD, though some men do. His statement, through Paul, exclusively to believers, is, "**Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus**", (Galatians 3:26). Or, as our Epistoller says, writing as Gospeller, "**As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name**", (John 1:12). So, reader, and writer, are we, by this token, really children of GOD?

Then, think of -

*The amazing love* - "**what manner of love**". Not for any worthiness, or attractiveness, of our

own, seeing that it was "**when we yet were without strength** (helpless to save ourselves) . . . **while we were yet sinners** (repellent to holiness) . . . **when we were enemies** (actually antagonistic to His grace)", (Romans 5:6, 8, 10), that GOD set His love upon us.

That is a remarkable word that is translated, "**what manner of**".

They tell me that its root significance is not so much of what kind, but of what country, which the learned Dr. Vincent confirms.

What an impressive effect that has on the other passages where it is found - for instance:

(a) "**What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him**" (Matthew 8:27) - of what country: not an earthly, seeing He has such authority, surely He belongs to another clime.

(b) "**This Man, if He were a prophet, would have known... what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner**", (Luke 7:39) - of what country: in their self-righteous superiority, they would not allow her to claim fellow-citizenship with themselves; surely she belongs to some nether region, beneath their recognition.

(c) "**Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be**", (II Peter 3:11) - of what country: a land beyond the skies, we are as pilgrims, travelling thitherward through the alien country of this present world. And now

(d) "**What manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us**", verse 1 - of what country: no earthly kingdom contains, nor could cultivate, a love of such sweet quality as this: only the dews and breezes of the Heavenly expanses could ever produce so bountiful, and so beautiful, a harvest.

*The established relationship* - "**that we should be called the sons of God**". What a privilege is this, to be numbered amongst the elect, and select, people of God, to be incorporated into the eternal Family of the Most High, to be grafted into the blessed Fellowship of CHRIST and His Church. It is well to be reminded that Family, and Fellowship go together.

There are special difficulties arising from being an only child in a family, which problems frequently arise in the case of those who fail to recognize that while we are "**born again**" one by one, we are not saved to live and serve in isolation, but in community. To be brought into the family of His children is to be brought, at the same time, into the fellowship of His Church. Let us make much of our church membership, and seek to avoid, where possible, the spirit of free-lance Christianity.

You remember the story of the old lady who, watching her son's regiment march by, exclaimed, "Look! our Tom's the only one in step!" Beware of that attitude in spiritual things. It is one of the dangers of rigid, and rabid denominationalism. How we thank GOD, then, for our Divinely granted relationship with Himself, and with our fellow Christians.

*The expected resemblance* - The children should bear some resemblance to the Heavenly FATHER. "**Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us**", (Ephesians 5:2); "**Be ye holy, for I am holy**", (I Peter 1:16); "**Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect**", (Matthew 5:48).

Even the people of the world expect professing Christians to be a little Christ-like, and accuse us of the lack of it. Do you observe a hint of that in the last clause of this first verse? "**therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.**" Put that round the other way, and say that if the world knew Him, it would recognize the likeness in us. Here is a boy I know, who has very distinctive features, who one day introduces me to his father - then I discover where he gets that mouth from, that colouring, that nose, etc. Like father, like son! It is a solemn, and salutary, question for each believer to ask himself: How far am I like Him?

There is another form of portraiture for us now to consider, what I would venture to call

### THE PHOTOGRAPHIC LIKENESS

**"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is"** (2).

**"Beloved"** - the apostle uses the greeting in no formal way: others may employ the word in a quite perfunctory manner, but not he. This man with a heart full of love embraced all in a feeling of real affection. Some time ago I was staying with Bishop J. H. Linton, and during those few days, he said, more than once, a simple little thing that greatly impressed me - "You know, I love people". You could see he did; you could see John did.

I think the Bishop's "J" ought to be John, but alas, it isn't! Well now, what about this photographic likeness, which the apostle longed to see reproduced in these that he so loved. What is required in order to get it?

*A Prepared Plate* - "**Now are we the sons of God**". Only so are we properly prepared, and susceptible to the reception of the image. In an ordinary photograph. it is no good expecting anything from any untreated piece of glass - it must be scientifically got ready for its special purpose. The spiritual preparation is covered by that part of our second verse that we have quoted at the opening of this paragraph "**now are we the sons of God**".

*No delay* - "**now**". We haven't to wait till the end: we are now the possessors, the inheritors, of this amazing privilege.

*No doubt* - "**are**". There is no perhaps, or maybe, about it. We do not just think, or merely hope, we know we are. John wrote his Gospel in order that "**ye might have life**", (John 20:31). He wrote this Epistle in order that "**ye may know that ye have eternal life**", (I John 5:13). Some people say that it is very presumptuous to speak with such certainty; but - which is the more presumptuous, to believe GOD's word, or to doubt it?

*No difference* - "**We**". Every real Christian can believe it, whatever little progress in the SPIRIT he may have made, however little knowledge of GOD he may have gained. "**We**" Christians - old and young, wise and foolish, important and insignificant, all of us, because it is not of our merit, or achievement, but entirely of His grace, can count it true that "**now are we . . .**"

That, then, is the all-over covering of the plate of our being, that makes us ready to bear the

likeness. But let us analytically examine the spiritual chemistry here, and see what are the component elements that make up this receptive quality. I think they are mainly three:

- (a) We are born again so that our very nature is completely changed; so that we are no longer, as it were, ordinary glass.
- (b) We are washed in the Blood - so that our very hearts are cleansed from the defilement of sin.
- (c) We are indwelt by the SPIRIT - so that our very lives are possessed by the power for holiness.

These are the blessed ingredients which are included within this potent preparation of the plate for Divine portraiture, our being "**sons of GOD**".

Now for the next step

*A Momentary Look* - "**We shall see Him as He is**". We spoke earlier of the damage that one look can do to the soul; but here is a quite different result of just one look, effecting immortal transformation in the soul.

I have seen some lovely sights in my time:

- a distant view of the rolling hills about the Devil's Dyke in the downs behind Brighton;
- the sight of a J. C. Gibbs racing for the line at Twickenham to touch the rugger ball down behind the goal posts, quickening a sportsman's pulse to race with him;
- a look at the immaculate cricketer, Jack Hobbs, executing with such precision that mighty sweep to leg which used so often to open his innings;
- a ravishing observation through a powerful microscope of one of nature's tiny marvels - the exquisite beauty and order of a snow-flake, or an insect's wing;
- the look through William Wordsworth's eyes at a hundred beauties and wonders of land and sky - about Keswick country, and beyond;
- the moving sight of a great congregation rapt to catch every syllable of the preacher's message.

Many such sights, and many more, have stirred my heart. But-but-I am going to see presently one sight that will eclipse them all: "**we shall see Him!**"

What an indescribably lovely thing that first sight of Him is going to be. What a purifying impression it is going to make.

Some folks tell us - how strange that the Bible doesn't mention it - that the fires of purgatory are needful to make us fit for the holy presence of GOD; but those who come unbiased to this verse of the Epistle will discover that one look, one momentary look, at Him will be gloriously sufficient to transfigure the least and the lowest into a perfect presentment of the Saviour. The lens of the camera takes a momentary look, its plate has been duly prepared for the occasion, and lo -

*An Instantaneous Impression* - "**We shall be like Him**".

If you know anything about your own "**deceitful**" heart, (Jeremiah 17:9), you will acknowledge

this to be one of the outstanding marvels of His Advent appearance, that you (yes, you), and I (yes, I) are to be, in a moment, changed into the perfect likeness of CHRIST. Is this really feasible? It was as if the HOLY SPIRIT, Who inspired John to write, knew that you would find this difficult to believe, and so led him to put this thing up against the things we don't know.

**"It doth not yet appear what we shall be"** - what sort of resurrection body shall we have; what degree of memory shall we carry over into the next life; how shall we recognize there, in their transfigured form, those whom we have loved down here. It is not for our good that we should know these things, and many others, or they would have been revealed.

But, says John, in effect, I'll tell you what we may be certain about. Lots of things about the future we don't know; but two things we do know.

(a) **"He shall appear"** - in spite of all the wishful thinking of the sinner, in spite of all the unbelief of many a teacher, in spite of all the ridicule of the impious, in spite of all the disregard of the pre-occupied, He shall appear: oh, glorious day!

(b) **"We shall be like Him"** - we find it hard to accept, as we have said. Too good to be true, we have felt.

Put all that aside, as unworthy of one who should be accepting all that He said as right, rest your soul on this His unbreakable, unshakable, promise, and, with a gay heart, look forward to the miracle. One sight of Him, and the photograph is taken.

Ay, but we are not there yet: what shall we do meanwhile?

### THE ARTISTIC LIKENESS

**"Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure"** (3).

The artist, in order to secure his picture, works so differently from the photographer. He has his model, he paints or chips patiently away, until he is able at last to present his finished study. There is nothing of quick accomplishment for him, but a going on, and going on. So it is here with our third photograph in mind; and, once again, three things contribute to its success.

*The Big Incentive* - **"Every man that hath this hope in him"**. This hope of His Return. How strangely mistaken are these people who suppose that the Advent Hope has no practical value for decent living, and encourages idle star-gazing. Observe any Christian man or woman who really believes in the Second Coming, and I venture to say you will find in either of them holiness of life and busyness of service.

The thought of meeting Him is one of the biggest incentives of the spiritual life, with its constant reminder, **"Be ye also ready"**, Matthew 24:44. Look at the word **"hope"** for a moment. In the New Testament it always means a certainty.

It is not, "I have not got it, but I hope I may", but "I have not yet got it, but I know I shall", that is certain.

The approaching Advent is a sure thing. He might also notice the little word, "**in**", which easily means "**upon**", followed by a capital "H". The A.V. looks as if the phrase means that the man has his hope within him, in his own heart; but the real meaning is quite different, and runs this way, "every man that hath this Hope set upon Him". The hope is not, in any sense, resting upon ourselves; but upon the unchangeable CHRIST. It is that which gives it the certainty that it assuredly possesses. And now we see that to hold this truth of His Return is to impart to life a great desire, and decision, to endeavour to represent Him now in our character and conduct.

For now, in this artist's attempt, we have

*The Perfect Model* - "**even as He is pure**". What a perfect, and, if left to our own resources, what an impossible Model to copy. Yet, as we learn from I Peter 2:21, CHRIST has left us "**an Example, that ye should follow His steps**". It has often been pointed out that the word here translated "**example**" is the word for a "copy-head".

My older readers will remember the old days ["the good old days"?] when we were taught how to write by those means. An automatically inscribed adage was at the head of the page - "A Stitch in Time saves Nine", "A Bird in the Hand is worth Two in the Bush", etc. - and we had to copy it line by line down the page. It was always noticeable that our effort deteriorated as we got farther away from the headline. Such is the picture Peter employs, with the impressive lesson, that if we would make a decent copy we must take care to keep close up to the Head. Of the man who wrote these very words we read, "**But Peter followed Him afar off**", (Matthew 26:58) - he followed, but far off; that's why he made such a mess of his copy-book!

Let no distance separate between you and Him - nothing of sin, to blot the page; nothing of self, to spoil the script of your behaviour; nothing between; to diminish your resemblance to Him, in the holiness of your life, in the happiness of your soul, in the helpfulness of your actions.

"Let it be seen that with Thee I have been,  
JESUS, my LORD and my Saviour.  
Let it be known I am wholly Thine own,  
By all my speech and, behaviour."

That leads us on to consider

*The Growing Portrait* - "**purifieth himself**". But I thought it was He, not we, that did the purifying work. Yes, you are quite right. Why, then, "**purifieth himself**"?

See that piece of soap? That is a rare purifier: but only if you take the trouble to use it. Then you will say that you washed yourself. Yet really it was the soap: you only wash yourself when you use the means provided. Just so is it with the purification of this verse. The HOLY SPIRIT is the Divinely provided Means - He does it. Our part is to use the way that GOD supplies - in that sense, we do it.

Look at II Corinthians 3:18 - "**We all, with open face** [nothing between us and Him] **beholding as in a glass** [the mirror of the Word] **the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image**

**from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord".**

You see again it is, primarily and fundamentally, He that does it. We do it only by employing the cleansing agent of the Word, as our LORD Himself says, in John 15:3, "**Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you**"; and as our very Epistle has told us, 1:7, "**the Blood of Jesus... cleanseth**". Notice once more "**cleanseth**", a present tense, "**purifieth**", same tense - it is a continuing thing.

To return to our illustration of the portraits, this is the gradual appearance, day by day, of the likeness - "**from glory to glory**". Expecting to "**see the King in His beauty**", Isaiah 33:17, how anxious we shall be to keep clean, to grow increasingly like Him.

Wouldn't you be ashamed if, on being commanded to a Royal Audience at Buckingham Palace, you found that you had got splashed with mud on the way. So does James 1:27 warn us that part of "**pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this . . . to keep himself unspotted from the world**".

Well now, to recapitulate, if we are sons and daughters of GOD, we are expected to exhibit something of the Family Likeness; one day we shall be transformed into His perfect likeness to Him, even in the conditions of this world, and in the circumstances of our own personal environment, "more holiness give me, more likeness to Thee", as the hymn says.

So - what sort of a portrait are we? On visiting a friend's house, we have sometimes gone into the drawingroom, and picking up a photograph from the mantelpiece, have said, "Who's this?" And we have been chided for not knowing, "It's so and so." "Why, I shouldn't have known him."

Another occasion, we have taken up a photograph and exclaimed, "Isn't that exactly like him?" Tell me, what sort of a portrait are we of Him?

May others see JESUS in me",

we sing. Well, do they?

A missionary was telling the story of JESUS - how kind He was, how gentle, how good, when a little heathen child said, "Please, that man used to live here."

Of course she was mistaken; but, you see, some while before a man lived in her village, so kind, so gentle, so good, that the child, when she heard about JESUS, thought at once that that must have been he.

What a testimony to him! What a portrait of Him!

~ end of chapter 6 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

\*\*\*