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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on
Wednesday evening 4th. July, 1956

Hymns: 305, 1059, 33

Reading 1 John 1 & 2.1-17 Text: 1 John 1.6-7

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in
darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have
fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His
Son cleanseth us from all sin."

The Apostle John opens this remarkable epistle by emphasising
the solemnity, certainty and reality of the things he declares.
Peter, writing to the scattered tribes, said "We have not
followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you
the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-
witnesses of His majesty." So it was with the Apostle John and
others of the Apostles. John says "That which was from the
beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes,
which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the
Word of life; that...declare we unto you." It is not some
sentiment we hold, some kind of religiosity, but we declare unto
you that revelation of divine truth relating to the Person of the
great Redeemer that was made known to us. "That which we have
seen and heard declare we unto you." It was then, a first-hand
testimony, not a second-hand evidence or something gathered up in
course of hearing what one and another may have said about these
things. It was the personal revelation of the truth that John
had in his own soul in a particularly striking way. It is
noticeable that his epistles refer in a particular way to the
Person of the Son of God, that Jesus is the Christ. John and
Peter and others, it is true, were literally witnesses of the
Person of the Son of God. They saw Him in the days of His flesh;
they enjoyed His company; they had communion with Him; they heard
His sermons; they saw His miracles. They believed in Him. They

saw Him at His crucifixion. They heard the voice of the Father saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Some may say, then it is no wonder they believed; they could be quite certain; they had no reason to question anything; to them everything was clear and beyond dispute; they were particularly favoured. So they were; but at the same time, every poor sinner is greatly favoured who has any gracious manifestation of divine truth in his heart, who is brought right down to feel his personal need of divine mercy and in whose soul is some gracious manifestation of the Holy Ghost and of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, so as to bring him clear away from all refuges of lies and false hiding-places to embrace the Rock for want of a shelter.

Do we know anything of this? What a wonderful mercy it is, what an amazing thing, that a poor, hell-deserving sinner, in himself lost in the ruins and rubbish of the fall, should, by the sovereign purposes of a covenant God, be made an heir of life, a partaker of eternal salvation and redemption through Christ! Yet such is the case with everyone truly taught of God and brought in some measure to know the blessedness of the everlasting Gospel in his own soul. But one point made by the Apostle John here, is to emphasise the fact that unless there is a conformity in a believer his profession is a contradiction. This is made clear in several places in these two chapters that we have read this evening. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." Some poor things here may perhaps say, that means I am out of the secret altogether, for I find and prove that the days of darkness are many; I feel to be like those of whom we read in the prophecy that they walk in darkness and have no light, or like Job when he felt to be enveloped in darkness and confusion. Do you feel like that in your soul and in your providences? Does that mean that you are cut off from these things because of that darkness? Not at all. There are two kinds of darkness spoken of in the Scriptures. There is the darkness experienced by the living family of God when the light of the Lord's countenance is withdrawn from them; when they see not their signs and fear they may have mistaken the way;

when they are uncertain about their own state and case and wonder where the scene will end; when the Lord's providential dealings appear cross-handed, mysterious and afflicting. That is not the darkness intended here. In the experience of the Lord's living family there may be much darkness. Their experience is very mingled. They are not always on the mount with the sun shining upon them so that they can say with an unwavering tongue, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" More often it is this: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." But there is a darkness which does not belong to the gracious, humble, consistent child of God under the unction of divine teaching. The darkness intended by the Apostle John here is the darkness of ignorance, the darkness of sin - that is of living in sin and ignorance of God. Darkness is used to describe ignorance, and light is taken for knowledge. Therefore the Apostle says, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." If we say with our lips that we have fellowship with God, walk with Him, have communion with Him; if we speak of personal experience and a knowledge of the things of God and of the doctrines of divine grace, and yet our life and walk are not in conformity thereto, we give the lie to our profession, we are but glaring hypocrites. A very solemn consideration this!

Here it must be pointed out that this is something very different from the mourning that the Lord's people feel because of the workings of sin in them. There is a difference between mourning before the Lord the felt working of sin in us and walking in known sin in the face of light and knowledge. Therefore the point with the Apostle John is that if we say we have fellowship with God, and yet walk according to the course of this world, the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life; if our lips and our feet do not go together; then we lie and do not the truth; we do not what we say. The Apostle Paul said "The good that I would I do not", but that is a different thing altogether from what John speaks of here, this walking in

sin while professing godliness. Writing to Timothy, Paul speaks of those who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof. If they have a form of godliness and maybe talk about godliness, and yet deny by their actions the power of it, then they lie and do not the truth. We read of Simon the sorcerer. He heard Philip preach and it is said that he believed, and was even baptised, which is more solemn still. He also continued with Philip, and yet after all there was no change of heart with him. He was in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity all the time. What a solemn consideration. He was evidently a contradiction. He made some profession of believing what Philip said and yet there was no change of heart with him. He is described by what John says here, he lied and did not the truth.

What a mercy it is when and where grace is given to walk worthy of the profession wherewith we are called in all lowliness and meekness. We shall all feel the opposite in us and may often fall, but that is a different thing from a persistent course opposite in its nature to what we have professed. What a mercy it is for a poor sinner to be kept humble before God, to be helped to watch and pray and to have in his heart the prayer we have been singing this evening:

"May I from every sin
As from a serpent fly;
Abhor to touch the thing unclean,
And rather choose to die."

John shows here that where the unction and teaching of the Holy Ghost is really in the heart the proof of that will be shown by an outward deportment consistent with this teaching. I know the Lord's dear people vary very much, and communion is very sweet, very uniting, binding, strengthening and confirming. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." Yet there may be many of the Lord's people who are fearful of saying much about themselves. They may not feel to have matters cleared up with them, have not been brought out as they have often prayed they might be, have not felt and enjoyed that blessing they believe many of the Lord's people are blessed with. Notwithstanding

this, they walk humbly before God and adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things. The darkness spoken of here then is not the darkness felt by the believer in his soul exercise when matters are not cleared up for him as he would desire, or when he may be walking in dark, conflicting providences which stagger him and put him to confusion. No, this darkness is the darkness of the world, of sin, of ignorance of God, where there is no enlightened understanding, no change of heart. It is sadly true many of the Lord's people have been left at times to a careless, backsliding state and have not adorned the doctrine they professed to love. This is very solemn, and we all need to tremble and maybe often feel like the hymnwriter:

"When any turn from Zion's way,
(Alas! what numbers do!)
Methinks I hear my Saviour say,
"Wilt thou forsake Me too?"

How does a heart tender in the fear of God respond to this? It says Lord help me, keep me, keep me near to Thyself, hold me up; do not leave me or I shall be sure to fall and be a contradiction to what I profess.

Now I would like to speak of the positive side of this, of what this fellowship is that believers enjoy in some small measure, for none of us can say very much about this, can we? Yet there is nothing sweeter to be known in the soul of a believer than fellowship with his God. Communion with God is the soul and life-blood of real experience. What an amazing mercy it is to consider - that poor unworthy worms should ever have intercourse and communion with Deity, that worms of earth should ever be one with incarnate Deity! There is then, some fellowship that believers enjoy with God and this is in a distinct way with the Persons of the blessed Trinity. There is something very profound in this and when we enjoy it we are on the threshold of paradise. In verse three we read: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." What a wonderful consideration! It gives such solemnity to real

religion and a gracious experience. Perhaps some of us do not feel to have much of that; I seem to have hardly anything left when I look at this. But here it is, and indeed it is a most blessed truth. Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Nor must we exclude the Holy Ghost with whom there is, in a gracious experience, the most sacred fellowship.

Now I would like to dwell a little upon this fellowship. What may we understand by it? It is not that universal charity of which so much is made. The Apostle does speak very pointedly of mutual love one with another among the Lord's people, and that is very sweet to feel; such union is sweet beyond words; but the fellowship here is communion with God. By fellowship we understand one-ness, agreement, communion. There is something very, very sacred about this. How can believers, the Lord's people, have fellowship in a particular way with the Father? It is the Father to whom John refers here when he says "We have fellowship with Him". This links up with the first clause of the following verse, "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." This is real religion, the religion that will take a poor sinner to heaven.

This fellowship with the Father consists, I believe in the first place in the union that subsists, as it is felt and enjoyed in the heart. In the dear Redeemer's prayer, as recorded in John 17 He said to the Father "I in them, and Thou in Me." Here is a body of divinity in a sentence - "I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one" - that is perfect in the Father and the Son as one in union. The Lord's people feel a particular fellowship with the Father in this union, as it is felt and enjoyed in the heart. There is a partnership, a giving and receiving, a communion, a fellowship with the Father in the spirit of adoption as the Holy Ghost bears His witness to the heart that we are the children of God enabling us to say "Abba, Father." O, this is a sweet, a wonderful fellowship! Have you ever had a moment in your life when you could look up to the heavens and say "My Father is in heaven; my Father is there; He is my Father; I have a Father in heaven, a heavenly Father"? I know some people often use the term 'our heavenly

Father' perhaps lightly and without much foundation; but, as I say, it is wonderfully sweet rightly to feel that God is our Father. If for a moment you can say humbly "My Father", then you have this fellowship, a sweet fellowship indeed. "My Father!" O, it is sweet to feel that. Perhaps some of you can unite with the hymnwriter -

"My God, My Father, blissful name!

O, may I call Thee mine?"

Why was it such a blissful name? Because the relationship was in a measure felt. It is great to feel that you have a Father, your heavenly Father who cares for you. The Lord Jesus said, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of." Even with our providences in this life, they are sometimes so important to us, they absorb us, they seem to drag us down. But in the midst of all there can be just a soft touch on your heart like this - "Your heavenly Father knoweth". There you may get a little fellowship with the Father.

Again, there is fellowship with the Father in His eternal love. John says, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." What manner of love! Has there been a particular time with you when you have felt the Father's love? I know we more frequently speak of the love of Christ, but I believe there are times with the Lord's people when it is felt to be the Father's love that is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. And when the love of the Father is felt, then there is a little fellowship with the Father, and very sweet fellowship this is. O it is wonderful to get just a little of this.

There is also at times a little fellowship with the Father in a holy and gracious submission in the heart to His divine purposes concerning us. There is nothing that will make crooked things straight like being able to say in your heart, "Thy will be done". They are familiar words, I know, but I believe there is something in what Rutherford says - "The will of God is a soft bed to lie upon." That is so when there is that inward acquiescence, a falling in submission before the Lord's purposes in His divinely ordained appointments; when with a little love in your heart you can say, "O Lord, my God, my Father, I have no complaint, I have no quarrel; Thy mercy to me is beyond all conception. I desire to fall into Thy blessed hands

and know no will but Thine, my Father." When you can say that you have a little fellowship, and it lifts you up and helps you to believe that you will endure to the end. It makes everything else secondary, and then we have fellowship with Him.

In the Second place there is fellowship distinctly felt with the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you know anything of that? Have you ever had a few moments in your life when you have walked with Him in some trial, or rather when He has walked with you in some furnace, so as to make it a sweet place? I have heard it said that the three Hebrews in the furnace breathed the sweetest air they ever breathed there. Do you know anything about that? If you know this fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ it is a fellowship of love such as the Apostle Paul desired for the Ephesians - that they might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge: that wonderful love that moved Him to undertake the cause of His people; that love that is beyond all conception.

"O love of unexampled kind
That leaves all thought so far behind,
Whose breadth and depth and length and height
Are lost to my astonished sight!"

Have you even once felt that you could repeat what Hart says in that last verse?

"For love of me the Son of God
Drained every drop of vital blood.
Long time I after idols ran,
But now my God's a martyred man."

It will melt your heart to get such fellowship and make you long to be gone from sin and all connected with it, to see the dear Redeemer as He is, without a veil between.

Then there is fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ in His temptations. Perhaps some of you will say that you know more about fellowship with Christ in His temptations than in His love. You are so often tempted and harassed by that inveterate foe. You find unbelief rising up and have to say "O, could I but believe". But even here, amidst these perplexing and bewildering temptations, as you are exercised under them and have to pray to be helped and kept, you may have some fellowship with the Redeemer in His temptations,

for "in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted." There is fellowship with Him in the support, help and succour that you have received from Him under your temptations. The Apostle prayed that he might know and feel this fellowship: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death."

Well, have I left you quite out of the secret? Do you have to say that all I have been preaching is foreign to you, you do not know anything about it? Well, if you do not know anything about it there is not much kernel in your religion. Anybody can be religious, but it is only those who are going to heaven who know what this sweet communion is. "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another". That refers to the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost and the children of God - they have fellowship one with the other. Mysterious, is it not? but yet a profound truth, and very, very sweet. I believe you might, when so favoured, walk down the streets of London having fellowship with the Trinity. I believe I have. I do not wish to infer that I know something great, beyond anyone else. I would not doubt that some of you have had it. It is sweet to be gathered up and fall at the dear Redeemer's feet, to cast yourself into His hand and say, "Lord, I have no quarrel, I believe that all is ordered well."

Fellowship one with another. This may also refer to the fellowship that the Lord's people have one with another. That is very sweet, is it not? Perhaps it is rather rare in these days, because of the absence of the Lord from us to a great extent. I believe that, generally speaking, there was much more fellowship in years gone by. The people of God seemed to be more lively in heavenly things, to converse more with one another about the things of God and their own exercises. Religion can be very real even when the mouth is comparatively closed by reason of the bondage that may be upon the spirit; but when the Lord comes, and blesses us a little, it opens the mouth as a rule, and you feel then that you can speak. I have known the time when I could have run away from

the Lord's people, lest they should start probing me; I could not bear that they should ask questions, I was so shut up. But when the Lord came and blessed my soul, I felt I could run after them and tell them what the Lord had done for me, and they seemed to like it and to be glad to hear about it. That is the fellowship the Lord's people have one with another, especially in the days of their espousals. Those days did not come very often but they were very sweet. Some of you know what they were, days when you felt to be satisfied with favour, when the Lord's blessing was in your heart. What kind of company did you want then? Did you want the worldling's company? No, the world was nothing to you, it was the Lord and His people you wanted.

"We have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Here the Apostle refers to the cleansing, separating, healing efficacy of the precious blood of Christ in the heart and experience of those who are favoured with this communion. There is an entering into the very essence of this communion as forgiveness is felt, as the conscience is purged and the soul is brought into the blessed liberty of the everlasting Gospel. It is sweet to feel this forgiveness; it seals things up and enters into this fellowship when the conscience is purged from dead works to serve the living God: mark that point - it is to serve the living God. If you are so favoured you will understand what the Apostle John here says about this contradiction, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." If the precious blood of Christ purges your conscience it will have its effect in your heart and life. You will say, "O Lord, help me to live to Thee; help me to walk worthy; help me to adorn the doctrine of God my Saviour in all things. "We come very short in many respects, but here it is: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son cleanseth us from all sin". May the Lord grant us a personal experience of this profound and blessed truth and give us to enjoy a little fellowship with Him, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.