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GENESIS A MIRACLE IN MORALS.

BY THE REV. J. P. ROBERTSON, D. D.,
Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Morrilton, Arkansas.

Strachan says: "Criticism has had its innings, and the time has come for appreciation." So he proceeds to write nobly on the beauty of "Hebrew Ideals." As a matter of fact he was no less in the realm of the higher criticism while defending the Bible than others had been in trying to undermine it. According to Dr. W. W. Moore: "The higher criticism is concerned with the age and *character* of the biblical books . . . their historical and *theological* contents." Hence Mr. Strachan, planting his guns in a different part of the same field, simply employed them, as a constructive critic, against a destructive element operating in the same sphere of investigation. And we shall be playing the role of higher critic just as much in quickening faith in the book as others in trying to kill it. A class of thinkers and would-be world leaders say the Creator, in religion, as they believe He did in nature, started with the lower and grossly imperfect forms and has gradually evolved the highest. Just as men are thought to have come up from ancestors, who first were senseless bivalves and snapping turtles, then fish and reptiles, then the advanced orders of beasts and birds, lastly men with brains, moral natures and evolved immortality, they say God, through the power or principle of evolution, had men to invent and practice morals that now disgust and to adopt and worship ideals of God that we would

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD—A BOOK STUDY OF 1 JOHN.

BY REV. EUGENE C. CALDWELL, D. D.,
Professor of New Testament Interpretation in Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia.

PROLOGUE 1:1-4.

The apostle John is a master in the fine art of composing a literary preface. His prologue to the Fourth Gospel is the sublimest writing that ever came from the pen of man. It is a perfect literary preface, in that it gives the theme and analysis of the Fourth Gospel. When you have discovered the theme and analysis of John's matchless prologue, you have the theme and analysis of his whole Gospel. His preface to the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:1-3) is likewise a work of consummate art. There he sets forth in order the source, the content and the importance of the revelation that Jesus Christ sends to the Church through his servant John. When we turn to John's First Epistle we find in the four opening verses another splendid preface. In splendor of thought and beauty of language it cannot compare with his introduction to his Gospel, yet it serves perfectly the writer's purpose and presents the three things that John wanted to say at the outset of his epistle. Let us notice these three things:

1. We have, first, the *qualification of the writer* to write on such a sublime theme as Fellowship with God through Jesus Christ (1:1-2). His fitness to write is based on a direct, personal, experimental knowledge of the Living Word, the Eternal Life. John had heard and seen and gazed upon and handled Jesus Christ. When John faced Jesus Christ he faced God; he stood in the presence of God; and he felt that he had touched the ultimate truth, the last reality in the universe. Christ made God a living reality to John. And out of his own experience John is able to bear witness to the reality of fellow-

ship with God through Jesus Christ, and by his testimony bring his readers of all ages into the same blessed fellowship. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, in order that ye also may have fellowship with us."

2. We have, secondly, the *theme of the writer* (1:2-3).

At this point the apostle states his theme, as we should expect, only in *general* language, reserving the full and explicit statement for the climax of his argument. The thought of 1:2-3 gathers round the words "Eternal life" and "Fellowship"; and with the help of two later passages where the theme is fully set forth we may combine these expressions in the full statement of the theme of the epistle as follows: "Eternal Life is Life in Fellowship with God through Jesus Christ." Christ himself has given the same definition of eternal life, when he said: "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). Henry Scougal has said that eternal life is "the life of God in the soul of man." The man of science declares that life is correspondence with environment. If that be true, perfect and eternal life must be perfect and eternal correspondence with a perfect and eternal environment. But only God in Christ is a perfect and eternal environment for the human soul. This brings us back to the apostle's definition of eternal life in his epistle: Eternal Life is Life in Fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. It is of peculiar interest to note the two places where John states his theme fully. The first place is at the climax of the first main division of the epistle in 2:24-25, "If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father, and this is the promise which he promised us, even the life eternal." We realize God's promise of life by abiding in the Son and in the Father. The second full statement of the theme is found at the second climax at the very end of the book, where the apostle says, "We are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ; this is eternal life" (5:20).

The idea of fellowship with God occurs over and over in

the epistle. It is expressed in various ways, sometimes by "to have," "to believe," "to be in," frequently by "to know"; but John's favorite word to express the thought is "abide," which is the key-word of the epistle and is used no less than twenty-three times.

3. We have, thirdly, the *purpose of the writer* (1:3-4).

From the standpoint of his readers John's purpose is to bring them into a living fellowship with God and with one another (1:3), and thus enable them to know that they have eternal life (5:13). From his own point of view his purpose is that his joy may be made full. His purpose, however, is really one; for his joy will become full when he leads his readers into fellowship with God and thereby into assurance of eternal life.

STRUCTURE OF 1 JOHN.

Before we pass on to consider the analysis of 1 John, let us pause for a moment to consider its structure. This has been one of the most difficult, yet one of the most fascinating, subjects we have ever pursued in New Testament study. The vast majority of New Testament scholars give up the attempt to find any structure and say the book has no system or orderly analysis. Others find only a circular movement of thought; that is, John simply goes round and round a few conceptions, such as, "God is light," "God is love," "God is life," without any real progress. But there is progress in the book. It may be spiral progress, but John is certainly climbing always higher and higher to his great climax in 5:12. "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life." We find two main divisions. First, chapters 1-2, where John is giving the Tests of Divine Fellowship; and, second, chapters 3-5, where we have the Fruits or Benefits of Divine Fellowship. We are now ready to study these divisions in detail.

I. *The Tests or Conditions of Fellowship with God* 1:5-2:29.

1. Confession of sin (1:5-2:2).

By the confession of sin the apostle means that we must acknowledge our sins before God without reserve; must renounce and forsake all sins and every sin; and must not keep a secret hold on any sin in our hearts.

a. The necessity for this confession before we can have fellowship with God lies in the holiness of God (1:5-6)

b. Blessed results of confession (1:7-2:2).

Our lost fellowship with God and with our fellow-Christians is instantly restored; then the life of our living Saviour (here the blood means the life) flowing in our spiritual veins continually cleanses us from all sin (1:7-10); and in Jesus Christ we have a righteous advocate who, in the presence of God, pleads his blood as the propitiation for our sins (2:1-2). The late J. Pierpont Morgan began his final will and testament with the following statement of the atonement of Jesus Christ: "I commend my soul into the hands of my Saviour, in full confidence that having redeemed it and washed it in his most precious blood, he will present it faultless before the throne of my heavenly Father; and I entreat my children to maintain and defend, at all hazards and at any cost of personal sacrifice, the blessed doctrine of the complete atonement for sin through the blood of Jesus Christ, once offered, and through that alone."

2. The second test or condition of fellowship with God is obedience to Him in imitation of Jesus Christ (2:3-6).

John here uses "knowledge" in the full, deep sense of that word. To know God is to be in union with Him, and keeping His commandments is the sure sign and test that we know Him. The great pattern of our obedience is the obedience that our Saviour rendered to his heavenly Father. He that saith he abideth in God ought himself to walk even as Christ walked. And when we thus obey, the love of God has been perfected in us, and God dwelleth in us and we in Him.

3. The third test of fellowship is love for our Christian brothers (2:7-11).

Obedience to God and imitation of Jesus Christ inevitably leads us to love our fellow Christians. No one can be like Christ and not love his brother. The command to love is "old" in that it is imposed upon us from the very beginning of our career as Christians; and it is ever "new" in that as we strive to obey it more completely it continually is leading us to heights of sacrifice and devotion and service we never dreamed of at first (2:7-8). Love for our brothers is an un failing test of our union with God. He who hates abides in the darkness of separation from God; but he who loves walks in the light of God's fellowship (2:9-11).

4. The fourth test and condition of our fellowship with God is hatred of the world (2:12-17).

a. Those to whom the appeal to hate the world is addressed (2:12-14). Hatred of the world is a matter of such great importance to those who would live in fellowship with God that the apostle here for the first time addresses his readers distinctly and directly. He urges hatred of the world first upon all members of the Church, whom he addresses as "little children." Then he singles out the old and the young. Both those who are advanced in their Christian experience and those who are just beginning the Christian life should avoid the world and the things of the world. John further emphasizes his appeal by a striking change of tense. Three times he says "I write," and three times "I have written." Many explanations of this change have been made; but the most likely explanation is that John means to say: "In all I have ever written and in all I now write or may write I would urge you to separate yourselves from the customs and ways of this present wicked world."

b. The reason for the appeal to hate the world (2:15-17).

The love of the world is incompatible with the love of the Father (2:15); because the Father and the world are utterly unlike and opposed to one another. They are unlike in the objects they magnify and exalt.

The world magnifies the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and all the vainglory of life. The Father does not (2:16).

They are unlike in their abiding and enduring quality. The world with all its lusts is doomed to pass away; but God and the doer of God's will abideth for ever (2:17).

5. The fifth and last test and condition of divine fellowship is absolute loyalty to Jesus Christ (2:18-29).

a. Need for loyalty to Christ (2:18-23). There are among them many antichrists, who would rob the Saviour of his glory and at the same time destroy the sinner's hope. Unlike the readers of this epistle, these antichrists have never been anointed by the Holy Spirit, and moreover no man who refuses to accept Jesus Christ as he is set forth in the Word of God can claim God as his Father. These antichrists can claim neither the anointing of the Spirit nor God as their Father. "Whosoever denieth the Son the same hath not the Father."

b. Appeal for loyalty to Christ (2:24-29). All who are loyal to Christ will receive three wonderful blessings. First, they shall abide in the Son and in the Father and thus make real and actual the divine promise of life eternal (2:24-25). Second, they shall have the anointing of the Holy Spirit to keep them from error and lead them into the truth (2:26-27). Third, they shall be ready to greet their Saviour with boldness at his second coming (2:28-29).

II. *The Fruits or Benefits of Fellowship with God* 3:1—5:12.

Having set forth the five tests of fellowship in the first two chapters, the apostle proceeds in the three remaining chapters to discuss the fruits of fellowship.

1. The first fruit of fellowship is sonship to God (3:1-12).

In one sense we become the sons of God the moment we believe in Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour. In another sense divine sonship is the growth of a life-time, and is the ever-ripening fruit of communion and fellowship with God. The more we live with Him, the more like Him we become, and the more fully and completely are we His sons.

a. Dignity and glory of divine sonship (3:1-3).

The most wonderful thing in the world is God's love in

making us His sons. It is wonderful, because of the character of the persons involved in the transaction. "Behold what manner of love the *Father* hath bestowed upon *us*." It is wonderful, because of our present rights and privileges as sons of God. "Now are we the sons of God." It is wonderful, because of our future glory. "We shall be like Him."

b. Obligation of divine sonship (3:4-9).

Our sonship to God obliges us no longer to continue in sin. Continuance in sin is incompatible with divine sonship. This is true for five reasons. First, continuance in sin on the part of a Christian violates the law of God, which is holy, just and good (3:4). Second, it stultifies the coming of our Saviour, who appeared to take away sins (3:5). Third, it interrupts our fellowship with Him (3:6). "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not." Fourth, it lines us up with the devil, whose works Christ came to undo (3:7-8). Fifth, it is contrary to our new nature, the seed of God, the germ of new life implanted by God in our hearts (3:9). In this section the present tenses and the present participles indicate clearly that John is speaking about the Christian's continuing in sin. In 3:9, where he says we cannot sin, he is referring to our new nature. The seed of God cannot sin. Paul expresses the same truth in Romans, chapter seven, where he says: "It is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me."

c. Manifestation of divine sonship (3:10-12).

Our sonship to God is bound to manifest itself in a righteous life and a loving heart (3:10-11), just as Cain showed that he was the child of the devil by his wicked life and hateful heart (3:12).

2. The second fruit of fellowship is assurance of salvation (3:13-24).

a. The sure sign that we are saved is our love for our Christian brothers (3:13-15). "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."

b. The unfailing test of the genuineness of our love (3:16-18).

We can tell whether we love in deed and truth by comparing

our professed love for one another with the great love of Christ which led him to lay down his life for us. When we are willing to give our lives for our brothers we know that our love is genuine.

c. The product of our genuine love is boldness toward God, the assurance that our prayers are answered, and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, all of which certify to our hearts that we have been saved and have passed out of death into life (3:19-24). Thus the thought that binds this paragraph (3:13-24) together is the assurance of our personal salvation.

3. The third fruit of fellowship is spiritual discernment (4:1-6).

If we are living in fellowship with God, not only can we tell whether we ourselves are truly God's, but we can tell whether others really belong to Him. We will be able to discern the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

4. The fourth fruit of fellowship is love made perfect (4:7-21).

John has already said many wonderful things about love in this epistle, but this passage contains par excellence his noblest and finest word on love. Here he speaks about the perfection of love, that is, love carried out to its utmost limit, love lifted to its highest pinnacle, love at its fullest floodtide.

a. We see the perfection of love in God (4:7-10). Are you looking for love? Would you like to see love in all its perfection and splendor? Then behold what God has done. "Herein is love, that God loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

b. We are called unto this same perfect love (4:11-21).

But we can attain unto it only by abiding in God. This perfect love is a fruit of our fellowship with God. "If we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us." "God is love, and he that abideth in love abideth in God and God abideth in him; herein is love made perfect in us." The result of this mutual abiding of us in God and God in us is the perfecting of our love, until it is like unto His own perfect love.

5. The fifth fruit of fellowship is eternal life (5:1-12).

It is perfectly true that we possess eternal life as soon as we exercise faith in Jesus Christ. But it is equally true that eternal life, which is the life of God in the soul of man, is a life of infinite growth and expansion. The more we live in fellowship with God the more we grow like Him, and the more fully and completely He possesses and fills us. Eternal life, God's own life in us, is the last and final fruit and flower of abiding in God. Hence, this paragraph (5:1-12) is a fitting climax to John's epistle. This last fruit of fellowship—eternal life—gathers up into itself all the other fruits. Divine sonship, assurance of salvation, spiritual discernment, and perfection of love combine to make up this most comprehensive fruit and blessing—Eternal Life. Thus, step by step, John has led us on as he winds higher and higher up the mountain of his thought, until he brings us to the very top and climax of his great theme: Eternal Life is Life in Fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

a. The victory of eternal life (5:1-5).

The happy possessor of eternal life will overcome the world and all its temptations.

b. The witness of eternal life (5:6-12).

He will also have an inner certitude, a witness in him. "And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life."

CONCLUSION 5:13-21.

1. The purpose John had in view in writing his epistle was to perfect in his readers the assurance of eternal life (5:13-17). "These things have I written unto you that ye may know that ye have eternal life." By a careful study of these tests and fruits of divine fellowship, they are able to tell whether they possess that life which consists in fellowship with God.

2. The security of the life eternal (5:18-21).