

FELLOWSHIP ITS BREACH AND ITS RECOVERY

(An Address on 1 John i. 5—ii. 2)

BY

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IN these verses, we have the great subject of the fellowship of the family of God, coupled with the possibility of sin, which would be a breach in that fellowship. They also show the provision God has made for the maintenance of this fellowship, and for its restoration, if and when we fail.

The term, fellowship, is often used in respect of ordinary affairs. Men of the world enter into fellowship with one another. With them the word has a meaning from their own point of view, and it signifies a common interest they have in certain things "under the sun."

In Scripture, however, we must remember words employed by the Holy Spirit have their own special meaning. This is evident, seeing they are used from God's, not man's, point of view. Sacred and heavenly matters are the theme. Men in their fellowship leave out God entirely. They consider only how they and their fellows are affected. The result cannot be the same as if God were brought in, and allowed to be the chief Factor and governing Director in that fellowship.

But we are now concerned with divine, not human fellowships, with that which is of God, and which could not be without God. How is the word used in Scripture? There even the term is not always used in precisely the same sense.

Thus, we learn that among Christian believers it is associated with the church of God. The fellowship of the

members of the body of Christ is symbolized by the "one loaf," prescribed for use at the Lord's Supper. This fellowship, peculiar to the whole assembly of God, is taught in the New Testament, along with many other privileges and responsibilities attaching to that truth.

But in the passage read from John we have, not the fellowship of the church of God as such, but the fellowship of the family of God. More than this, it will be seen that as well as the fellowship of the family one with another, there is fellowship with God—with the Father and the Son.

Is not this marvellous? I challenge you to produce a more important subject in the Christian life than that of our fellowship with God. Fellowship with one another, apart from fellowship with the Father and the Son, would be but a poor human affair, doomed to disappointment and failure spiritually. But fellowship first of all with the Father and the Son makes fellowship with one another easy and spontaneous, pleasant and joyous.

What is meant by fellowship? Two persons or more in fellowship have common thoughts, common feelings, common purposes, common desires. Briefly, those in fellowship are "at one" in all concerning them that matters. Now think of our fellowship with God from this standpoint. I, a poor worm, a creature of the dust, a mote in life's sunbeam, I am by grace enabled to have common thoughts, feelings, and objects with the Father and the Son. Is not this incredible, apart from Scripture?

Without that revelation, it would be a blasphemous assumption. But, through the Lord Jesus Christ, this privilege of fellowship is guaranteed to all those belonging to the family of God. As believers in the Son of God, it is their own incomparable portion to be made privy to the thoughts, purposes and mind of God, so far as these are made known in the Scriptures.

This fellowship has not always been known to men. In the first four verses of this Epistle, the apostle John shows its origin. This is connected with the appearance of the Word of life. We read nothing of it in the Old Testament. Why? Because the Son of God had not been here.

In New Testament days, the Son came into the world to manifest the Father, to make Him known to men. In former days, God's power and might and majesty and judgment as Jehovah might have been seen. But now One in the bosom of the Father came from heaven. He came into the world that men might see in Him what the Father is, and thus He provided the basis of fellowship.

This manifestation by the Son was simple, yet profound. The woman at Sychar's well might not only look at Him as the Christ, but by faith see the Father in Him. The very child taken up in His arms would feel a warmth in that embrace which was not of earth, a love it had never known in its mother's bosom. This was the love of God, the love of the Father in the Person of the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Weary men and women, heavy-laden with the toils and infirmities of this life, found the choicest emotions of heaven brought to them in the compassions of the Saviour. Even publicans and sinners, believing on the Son, proved the welcome of a Father's love.

This fellowship is a great reality in Christian experience. It is not contained in a learned disquisition on some learned subject beyond the reach of most. The apostle says it is based on something seen, heard, looked upon and handled. It depends upon an Object outside of ourselves, upon the Son of the Father's love.

When the blessed Lord Jesus was here, the love of God was manifested in Him. All that was in the Father's heart shone in the face of the "Man of Sorrows." And the twelve apostles who walked with Him in Judea and Galilee saw this glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten with the Father.

Thus the apostles had fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The Father spoke to them of His Son, Who was derided by the world and rejected by His own people. He testified, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." And the apostles heard that testimony from heaven, that certificate of divine purity, holiness, godliness and love inseparable from Eternal Sonship.

The Father bore witness to the Son; and what did the Son not do for the unfolding of the Father! He did not

speak a word other than the words the Father gave Him to speak. He did not perform a single deed or miracle except in direct obedience to the word from on high. Morning by morning He opened His ear to hear as the learned. He Who from the beginning knew all things was pleased to wait for His Father's word. He and His Father were one.

This fellowship between the Father and the Son, John saw and heard, and others too. This knowledge was not acquired after hard study by men of big brains. No. Hard-working men and women could contemplate it in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Mary learned it at the feet of Jesus.

You may say, "They did not understand this fellowship of love between the Father and the Son." Don't talk about *understanding* it! We do not even understand the love one has for another. We recognize the love, but cannot explain it. No one can describe exactly the love a man has for his wife, or the wife for the husband. The mutual love is a positive fact, and it exists unquestionably between the persons. So we believe the Gospel saying, "The Father loveth the Son."

This fellowship of eternal life and eternal love the apostles learned in Christ Himself, and from them it comes to us. So John says, "This is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you." This message, he says, not commandment, is for you, dear children of God. We enjoyed it as we walked with the Lord. Now He has gone on high to the Father, you can have fellowship with the Son there, just as we did.

"But," you say, "there is nothing about fellowship in this verse. The next words are, 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.'" Scripture never makes a mistake. There is a reason for these words about light. Before the Spirit of God speaks about fellowship, He points out the nature of the One with Whom we have fellowship; God is light.

Observe that it is not said, "The Father is light," but "God is light." Light conveys a different thought from love. Love is the centre and circumference of fellowship, and wherever the love of God is, His light is also. There can be no fellowship apart from the light, for the reason that while

God is love, He is also light. And God will not allow one side of His nature to exceed or to eclipse the other.

God is perfect as light as well as love. His love is infinite, and so is His light. And His children must know this. In our own families, children must know their parents thoroughly before they can have a perfect fellowship of understanding. If an important part of the parents' lives is kept dark from the children, there can be no real fellowship. It is a one-sided affair, and the children even misunderstand their parents.

So then, to have fellowship with God, we must know that He is light. Light is the purest element in existence. Its intense purity cannot be defiled. A ray of light shining upon a stagnant pool of corruption remains perfectly pure. It cannot be contaminated in any way. So the light of God resists all that is corruptible and evil, arising out of moral darkness. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." God is not one part light and one part dark; He is light, absolutely.

This light shines upon everyone who comes into the vicinity of God, revealing the truth. This was seen in the Garden of Eden. Jehovah came there after our first parents had sinned. The serpent had deceived Eve, and Adam had transgressed. Both retreated behind the trees to hide themselves from the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden.

They were afraid, for they were naked. The coming light of the divine presence made them fear its revelation of their disobedience. They sought to put some screen between themselves and the light of God. Fear made them conceal themselves. Fellowship with God was broken by their sin.

If in my heart I fear a person, I cannot have fellowship with him. If I am afraid and tremble in his presence, how can our two hearts be knit together as one? Fear, distrust and suspicion destroy true fellowship.

It is a solemn truth, therefore, that God is light. Ask yourself the question, Is there anything hidden in my heart which makes me tremble at the thought of the presence of God? Am I ready without fear to expose the innermost part of my being to the light of God? Can I go into my

closet and cry to God to search me and try me and see if there is any wicked way in me ?

Unless your soul has been laid bare to the light of God, you cannot know true fellowship with Him. You may deceive yourself, but you cannot deceive God. He is light. He is holy. He is true. He knows every secret of your soul, and He wants you to look at them with Him in the shadowless light of His presence.

Let us not skip this truth. It is of the utmost practical importance to every child of God, old or young. Young believer, if you have not had everything out before God in the revealing light of His presence, do so immediately. If you have anything covered up in your heart and life, secreted from everyone, never yet exposed to the light of divine holiness, remember God knows it. That defiling thing stands as a dark cloud, between you and God, Who is light.

And yet God is love. Although He knows you are guilty, having done things which others do not suspect you either could or would do, yet He loves you in spite of what you are. Have you proved this ? Can you say, Though I were the very chiefest of sinners, still God loves me, and He gave His Son for me ? Is this the knowledge of your heart ? You may talk in hackneyed phrases about John iii. 16, without knowing its force. You can speak so often about it that its real beauty has gone for you. To feel the love of God when thoroughly searched by the light of God is another experience altogether. But this is God's introduction to the character of the fellowship He has provided for all His children—fellowship in the light.

There is true fellowship, and false. The apostle exposes the kind which is untrue, a mere profession of the lips. It is something which we "say." What we say we utter that others may hear. Our thoughts are crystallized into words. Saying is a step farther than thinking. But even in what we think, there may be something reserved, if the light has not shone into the heart, which is deceitful above all things.

Hence, in what we "say," we may deceive others. We may tell them fifty per cent. of the truth, or seventy, or

even ninety per cent., still leaving something concealed, which is of darkness, and not of the light. We are walking in darkness.

John says plainly, "If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." We cannot know this fellowship unless we know the truth about Him and about ourselves. The truth of the gospel is that the Son came down among living men and told those who believed, "The Father Himself loveth you." I am among you as the Good Shepherd. You were lost, and I sought you. I found you, I brought you unto Myself. You know how much I love you. Well, the Father also loves you. I do not love you more than He does.

In His ministry, the Son always showed a jealousy for the Father's honour and the Father's love. This was His constant theme. If He spoke of Himself, it was only to reveal to men thereby the love of the Father's heart. And what did the Father reveal to babes? When He looked down upon the Son, He declared, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Listen to Him, and you will never go wrong. He is the Truth.

Thus, we have in the Gospels the revelation of perfect unity, concord, fellowship between the Father and the Son. And the person who has received this revelation has learned the first principles of divine fellowship. He has learned it in the Father's thoughts of the Son and in the Son's thoughts of the Father. And He knows it because he is walking in the light. Those walking in darkness are outside the sphere where the light of God's presence continually shines. They are unconverted, and even they can say, "We have fellowship with God." But then they lie and do not the truth.

The apostle warns us against taking words upon our lips which are contradicted by our walk. If we are walking not in darkness but in the light, we shall not have a lie upon our lips, for the light reveals the truth, and condemns the false. John's words are always very searching. He often touches our heart in his Epistles, because he is so plain and downright. He writes in sharp alternatives.² There is no *via media* with him. You are in either the light or the darkness; you

are speaking or doing the truth, or you are telling, or acting a lie.

The Spirit of God uses such a keen saying about fellowship as this to set persons in their right category. What a grand discovery it would be if everyone in this audience found himself in the blessed family of God! and if no one here is *saying* I have fellowship with God, and yet is working the works of darkness, walking in the ways of the prince of darkness, living secretly in what is evil! Such persons are living a lie, and the truth of God is not in their hearts nor in their ways. Fellowship with God demands holiness and purity of walk. The standard is high.

Now in verse 7, we turn from walking in darkness to walking in the light. What the apostle says is applicable to all the family of God. Let it be clearly understood that the phrase, "walking in the light," is descriptive of every person who is a Christian, who belongs to the Lord. It applies to him at all times, from the moment of his believing to the moment of his exit from this world. He is one who walks in the light.

You may say, I do not like that way of putting it. For myself, I cannot think I am always walking in the light. I really believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I believe God is my Father, and that He gave His Son for me. I believe my sins are forgiven. But I find in my heart what ought not to be there. Sometimes I find myself doing and saying what is wrong, for which I am sorry. Besides I feel that I do not love the Lord as I ought. Surely, I must be walking in darkness. No. It is because you are in the light that you feel guilty of these things.

Every believer is one who walks in the light as God is in the light. In the presence of God he first confessed his sins and received forgiveness, and from that moment he abides in the light. The light is the sphere of his movement as he walks, and he never walks outside that sphere.

Let me try to illustrate the truth. Supposing an Israelite was able to walk from the entrance to the Tabernacle straight through the courts to the tent, lift the first veil, and then the second, and so come into the Holy of Holies where the Ark

was with the Shekinah-glory abiding upon the mercy-seat. He is now in the light of Jehovah's dwelling-place, His habitation in the wilderness. The cubical room which he has reached is filled with light. Once he was away in the camp, he is now in the abode of light.

Now, in the light of His presence is where God puts every believer. If you own that you are not walking according to that holy light, but walking very much like a man of the world, who is in darkness, then on your own confession, you are not walking *according* to the light. You have fallen below the standard God has given you. You have failed to this extent.

And it is just when you fail in your walk that your consciousness of fellowship is lost. I think you must know this as a matter of experience. You sometimes enjoy communion with God. You like to think of Him and His love. You like to think of the Lord Jesus, of His beauty and excellency, of His wonderful works. Your heart glows as you read the Scriptures; every word seems a mouth speaking to you great things about Christ.

But another time, the Scriptures seem very dull. You find nothing interesting there. Daily reading seems a hard task. What has happened? A cloud is between your heart and the sunbeams of light and love. In your heart and life something has happened to cause this change. You are the naughty child. You have failed, but the Father remains faithful. His light still shines, but you have put up a barrier. Your fellowship with God is broken.

Fellowship or communion (the two words are interchangeable) imply joy and peace in the presence of God. Prayer is a form of communion, or, to speak more correctly, it should be so. In prayer, we come into His presence to ask for grace to help in time of need, while in fellowship, there may be just delight in the Father and the Son, without bringing any petitions. The two may be distinguished, therefore.

The little child we have heard about illustrates this kind of fellowship. She came into the father's study where, with his desk littered with papers, he was knitting his brow

over some problem. Looking up, he said, "Well, Mary, what do you want?" "I don't want anything, father." "Then why did you come in here?" "Only to be with you, father."

So the child sat still, and said nothing. She just wanted to be with her dear father. This was communion, the contented union of two loving natures. She had been there before for a penny to buy a toy. But now she only wanted to sit with her father. She loved him, and delighted to be with him.

Is it your practice and mine to sit down quietly in the peace of God's presence? Do you esteem such fellowship more than other experience? To be rapt with wonder and worship in the presence of the Father and the Son—this is communion. And this unique privilege belongs to those who walk in the light, as God is in the light. Moreover, in the exercise of this fellowship with Him, we have "fellowship with one another."

Then we are shown the righteous ground of this association in the light: "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Let me remind you of the analogy already mentioned of the one in the most holy place in the Tabernacle, where the light shone from the Shekinah-glory enthroned upon the mercy-seat. There we see a smear of blood upon the mercy-seat, and before it there are seven marks of blood, the witness of propitiation, the righteous ground upon which Jehovah could speak favourably to the people among whom He dwelled.

Here in John's Epistle those who walk in the light as He is in the light are shown the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, which cleanseth from all sin. The efficacy of this precious blood maintains the children of God in their standing in the light, even when they sin. The light reveals to them the value of that blood.

If we sin, Satan says, "You cannot now go to God." The devil lies to destroy the believer's peace and joy. If you have sinned, go straight to God and confess that sin. As you bend in penitence before Him, you will see His light shining upon the cleansing blood of Christ. That blood

avails to purify you from sin whatever its form may be.

Next, another wrong profession is condemned, "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves." This is the height of self-deception. We assume, not only that we have not sinned, but that we are without sin, without even the disposition to anything displeasing to God. We fancy we have arrived at that stage of Christian life when sin is altogether absent. This species of pseudo-holiness is a foolish and evil delusion. If we claim it, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

The root of sin remains within the child of God. You can never get rid of it. It is like some of the troublesome weeds in the garden which have spreading roots beneath the soil. You pull up what is above the ground, but the roots remain behind and grow again. If the tiniest fibre of root is there, it will grow. Whatever we do, we cannot eradicate sin from our hearts. We may think we have done so because we cannot see any root, but we deceive ourselves, the Scripture says.

But if we cannot get rid of sin, what are we to do when the evil nature becomes active, and we commit sins? "If we confess our sins, He is faithful"—I like that word "faithful." God is faithful. He is not like man. It is man's way to relinquish his side of the bargain when the other fails on his side. But what does God do when we fail? He will never let us go. He shows the remedy. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful . . . to forgive us our sins." If then you have sinned, own it without any qualification or excuse. Say, "I have sinned. I have done this evil in Thy sight." He will forgive and cleanse you.

But observe He is just or righteous as well as faithful in forgiving and cleansing. The reason that He is just in doing so appears in the second chapter. Jesus Christ the righteous is in the presence of the Father. Not only is the blood of Jesus Christ in the light, but Jesus Christ Himself, Who shed that blood is with the Father. Hence when we confess our sins we are cleansed from all unrighteousness.

The cleansing is needful for fellowship. If I have unrighteousness upon me, how can I have fellowship with Jesus Christ the righteous? What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? If it is broken, how can it be

restored? He is faithful and just to cleanse me from all unrighteousness by His word. The water of the word removes unrighteousness from me, and then I am able to be in communion once more.

Now, the opening of chapter ii shows the object of this passage—that we should not sin and so lose our fellowship. “My little children, these things write I unto you *that ye sin not.*” There is, therefore, the possibility, the danger of our sinning. Do you believe this danger exists? Or do you cherish the delusion that it does not apply to you?

Let us be plain. Supposing the Lord leaves you here until to-morrow, the Lord’s day, is there any danger of your sinning between now and then? Is it possible that some sin may interfere with your communion? The apostle believed there was, and he wrote these things that you might not sin.

But if you should sin in spite of the warning, what happens? Is there any personal help for you? “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” There is comfort in this. I can imagine a man being doubtful of himself because of his liability to be overtaken in a fault. He is afraid of himself because he has a quick temper or the like. He wants someone to keep him from falling, and to restore him should he fall. We have our Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He does this, and much more.

What is an Advocate? A popular idea is that it is the One Who turns the anger of the Father into love and favour towards us. Mary does wrong at home, and the father is inclined to be angry with her. She fears his anger, and she says to her brother, “Thomas, father loves you; go to him for me, will you? Speak for me, so that he may be no longer cross with me” Mary looks upon Thomas as her advocate, when father is angry with her.

But this idea does not represent the truth in this case at all. Jesus Christ, the righteous, does not turn the Father from anger to love when we sin. The Father is righteous too. He will not pass over sin in His children, but judges in His own house. And it is not implied here that the Advocate changes the Father’s heart towards His erring children. The words “with the Father,” are not rightly understood.

The phrase, "an Advocate *with the Father*," indicates where the Advocate is. Jesus Christ is no longer in the world; He is with the Father. In John xiii. we read of Jesus being about to depart out of this world unto the Father. He was about to ascend out of this world unto His Father and our Father. He also promised to send another Advocate, the Spirit of truth, to be with us here in the world during His absence. And now in the Epistle we learn that, while He is no longer with us here, He is with the Father as our Advocate.

What then does this Advocate do? An Advocate or Paraclete is One Who undertakes the management of all my affairs, even if I sin. He has my cause at heart, and has undertaken to see to everything Himself. This seems to be the simplest and most comprehensive meaning of this beautiful word.

There with the Father, the Lord Jesus in His love is supervising our concerns. This He is doing before we sin that we may not sin. And when we sin, He does not wait until we confess our sins, but uses His word by the Holy Spirit so that we may confess and be cleansed in order that our communion may be resumed.

The eye of Jesus Christ the righteous was upon Simon Peter before his fall. When Satan was after the self-confident disciple, the Lord prayed for him. Before Peter went into the high priest's palace, before he had defiled his lips with oaths and curses, the Advocate on earth had interceded on his behalf. Peter was preserved from such an end as Judas had by the advocacy of his Master. This Advocate is now with the Father, and we have Him there for us.

We need this Advocate in many ways and at all times, but if anyone sin, he needs the Advocate in the character of Jesus Christ the righteous. Sin brings the believer under the charge of unrighteousness from which he must be cleansed to enjoy fellowship (i. 9). Who undertakes this? Jesus Christ the righteous. It is He Who is made unto us righteousness, and in Him we have a standing of righteousness before God, unvarying and invariable.²

If we do not live up to this standing, we fall below it

into unrighteousness. All who have been given this standing in the light may not live according to it, but he does not forfeit his standing. A prince of royal blood may do something derogatory to his high rank, but he is still a prince by birth. So the child of God that sins loses his communion but not his relationship by birth. The Advocate undertakes his conviction, confession, forgiveness and cleansing by His faithful and loving service.

The eyes of the soldiers and the servant-maid did not affect Peter's conscience, but the eye of the Lord broke down his hardihood.⁴ He fled into the night, naked and ashamed, a repentant soul, suffused⁵ with the tears of self-accusation. The Lord did not leave Simon Peter until he was converted and restored. Then Jesus Christ the righteous committed to his care His sheep and His tender lambs—a combined task for which none is suited unless the Advocate has exercised His skill upon them.

This Advocate is now with the Father, there to deal in wisdom and mercy with us, even if anyone sin. His present service is to maintain us in that fellowship which is heavenly in nature. It is this fellowship which fits us to be witnesses for Him while we are here. When we are in communion, He moulds and fashions us to His liking. When we are out of communion He labours for our restoration. If anyone sin, this Advocate is not baffled and beaten.⁶ He makes the best out of a very bad job. "O Lord, Thy love's unbounded!"

But a further truth is stated about the Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous. "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Though there is the amplest provision for our sins, as we have already seen, we are not to underestimate the grievousness and the guilt of our sins. Sin is always a terrible act, and serious to the utmost degree in the case of a child of God, indwelt by the Spirit of God, and possessed of every heavenly privilege.

Hence we are shown that the One Who is our Advocate is the One Who suffered and died for our sins, Who is the propitiation for our sins. He made propitiation by His atoning sacrifice, and in Himself He is the propitiation,

comprehending in His Person all that the work of propitiation signifies and accomplishes.

Who knows more about our sins than our Advocate? He bore our sins, and offered to God what for ever satisfied His holy nature with regard to them. He carried out every iota of this work; to Him belongs all the glory of propitiation; and He is our Advocate, even when we sin.

Jesus Christ was the propitiation for our sins on the cross: He is the propitiation on the throne in glory; He is the propitiation with the Father. He is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever. And He is our Advocate! In the power of His person and the efficacy of His work upon the cross, He is the Manager of our affairs, our Intercessor when we sin, our Upholder in all that appertains to our fellowship with the Father and the Son, as well as with one another.

I wish we could realize what a blessed Advocate we have, and what is the fullness of His power and His love. We so often forget Him and His unseen ministry on our behalf. How often we make Him serve with our sins! We are so fractious, so wayward, so wilful, so obstinate; yet He never leaves nor forsakes us. His object is that we should have unbroken communion with Himself, with His Father, and with one another.

Fellowship is one of the greatest blessings of the Christian life. Our Advocate is with the Father to enable us to share in it. He wants us while we are here on the earth to share His own fellowship with the Father in heaven. The sunshine of the heaven of heavens is enjoyed on earth by this means.

The Father and Son are united in purpose—in everything, and it is the will of God that we, being of His family, should be admitted to share the secret harmony of divine fellowship. May God grant that we may be led of Him into a deeper comprehension of this communion, and of all that it should mean to us amid the occupations and distractions of daily life.

This fellowship is not for fathers and young men only, but also for babes in Christ, since they too know the Father. And if they know the Father, they must rejoice in Him. What else could they do except rejoice in such a Father?

In Luke xv., we have an illustration of our fellowship with the Father. There was no fellowship between the lost sheep and the shepherd and his friends, and certainly not between the lost coin and the woman and her neighbours. The coin and the sheep did not enter into the joy of finding. But when the lost son comes home, we see him at the table with his father. There, too, we see the ring, the best robe, and the fatted calf. The father and son begin to be merry together. The son says, "Was there ever such a father?" The father says, "This is my boy. He was in the far country, now he is home. He was lost, and is found. He was dead and is alive again." This is the fellowship with the Father to which the Son brings us.

Out in the field, there is the elder son, who is outside the fellowship of the home. He is a son as much as the prodigal. His place is at the table also. But there is no spirit of fellowship in him. His heart is hard and cold. He will not own his penitent brother. "This thy son," he says, not "my brother." There is no desire for fellowship with his father even; "thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends." He prefers his friends to his father.

The elder son was an utter stranger to the sort of fellowship at the table between the father and the son. The parable, however, gives a little picture of the sort of fellowship that is ours—fellowship with the Father and the Son and with one another. Even if sin interrupts this fellowship, we have an Advocate with the Father. And He is the propitiation for our sins. And if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.



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