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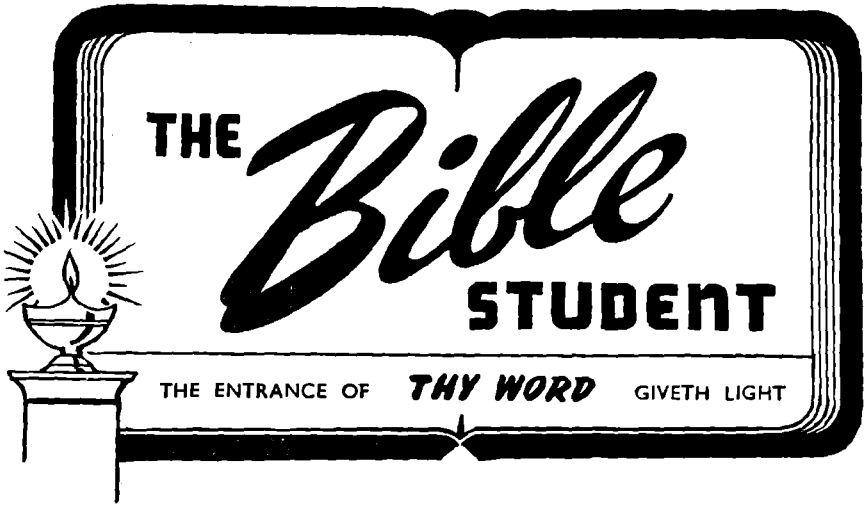
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THE

Bible

STUDENT

THE ENTRANCE OF **THY WORD** GIVETH LIGHT

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in barest possible outline, and it can only be of use to the student who himself pursues the lines of thought indicated, and who by personal and diligent study 'discovers' the book for himself by personal study and prayer.

THE DIVINE FELLOWSHIP AND WORK

A STUDY OF THE DISPENSATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF JOHN 17

By ROBERT RENDALL (Orkney)

The Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—record outward history: the book of The Acts extends this narration of events. Together, they form an account of God's self-revelation among men, first in His incarnate Son, and later, through the apostles and their successors, in His Spirit. The Gospel of St John not only supplements the history, but interprets it, giving the inward and spiritual significance of the whole movement. The first twelve chapters cover the work of the Son upon earth, and account for the course of events recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke: chapters 13 to 17 provide a like commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, showing how the work of God first manifested in the incarnate Son is now continued from heaven through the apostles upon earth. The Gospel of John therefore gives us a conception of God's work in redemption and revelation covering a wide field of time. It has that same breadth of vision, that same sweep of outlook, which characterizes prophecy.

This relation between John's Gospel and those of the Synoptics appears in much detail. Where Matthew and Luke, for example, give in plain narrative the birth of Jesus Christ, John's Gospel treats of the Incarnation. So is it also with the account of the Lord's approaching Passion: Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell of His agony in the garden, when He fell on His face to the ground, and prayed, 'Father, let this cup pass from Me'. John tells how He lifted up His eyes to heaven, conscious of the glorious issues of His work as the incarnate Son, and how He could say in the

moment of trial, 'The cup which My Father hath given Me to drink shall I not drink it!' (18:11). Again, the three Synoptic Gospels give, in various forms and with different emphases, the great commission to 'go into all the world and preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to every creature'. John 20:21-23 is the Divine viewpoint of this great action, and in turn should be interpreted by the plain language of Mark 16:16 and Luke 24:47-48.

The Lord's prayer in John 17 gave expression to a holy fellowship between the Father and the Son, but was also intended to establish a like fellowship between the Lord and the twelve, since the Lord specifically says, 'These things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves'. Prayer instructs: Indeed, the highest reaches of divine truth would seem to require prayer for their perfect utterance. Paul, addressing believers in God's truth, when he comes to its sublimest heights, as in Ephesians, abandons direct teaching and soars on the wings of prayer. Solomon acted likewise. So John seventeen, which indeed we approach with unshod feet, must not solely be read for the sake of its devotional value but also as divine instruction in the mystery of godliness.

John 17 gives a dispensational view of the work of the incarnate Son in relation to the glory of the Father, and of its far issues in that blessed unity that will for ever exist between God and the redeemed—a mutual indwelling that has its high original in the unity of love between the Father and the Son. The prayer has three distinct sections, each chronologically an advance on the other: first, His petition concerning Himself, 'Glorify Thy Son;' secondly, His petition concerning the twelve, 'Keep them . . . which Thou hast given Me . . . sanctify them;' and, thirdly, His petition concerning the whole body of believing men and women subsequent to apostolic days, 'Neither for these (the apostles) only but for them that believe on Me through their word'. All three are phases of His work as the incarnate Son: first, His work *on earth* in manifesting the Father; then His work, in *resurrection*, in sending forth and enduing the Twelve; and, finally, His work as our ascended Lord in *uniting all believers* within a holy fellowship by the power of the Holy Spirit, the pledge of future glory.

The fellowship of love within the Godhead constitutes the glory and blessedness of the Triune God. This holy fellowship,

a mystery hid from human understanding, but revealed to faith, is grounded in the essential nature of His Being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One God, blessed for ever.

O LIGHT that knew no dawn
That shines to endless day,
All things in heaven and earth
Are lusted by Thy ray.
No eye can to Thy throne ascend
Or mind Thy brightness comprehend.

In a matter so far beyond our human modes of comprehension we do well to adhere to the strict words of Scripture and to let our thoughts be moulded by these. Let us, therefore, ponder the depth of such utterances as these: 'the Life, the eternal, which was with the Father' (1 John 1:2); 'Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world' (John 17:24); 'the glory which I had with Thee before the world was' (17:5); 'the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father' (1:18); 'No one knoweth the Son, save the Father: neither doth any know the Father, save the Son' (Matt. 11:27). Summed up, this holy fellowship within the Godhead can only be conceived of as an essential activity of the divine Being. Love and light are the life of heaven, for God is light and God is love.

The intention that men should be brought within this fellowship lies behind that amazing statement, 'The Word became flesh' (John 1:14). For this statement forms a climax to the series already given in verses one and two concerning the Divine Word. The ultimate purpose of this revelation transcends all language except that so simple and monosyllabic that it becomes intuitive rather than logical. 'That they all may be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us . . . that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in Me' (John 17:21-22). This is the supreme blessedness purposed for man by Him Who in His essential nature of love desires to communicate His own joy to us. Creation and redemption have here their fullest explanation.

This is truly a Divine work, dispensational in scope, the stages of which are clearly discernible in this revelatory prayer. The original Source is God Himself in His Divine nature, but the eternal Life which was with the Father is so manifested to the

men which the Father had given Him out of the world, namely, the apostles, that Christ here could claim, 'I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do'. This revelation of the Father by the Son was delivered in a 'word' (*logos*) or 'message'. Christ could say, 'They have kept Thy word. Now they know that all things which Thou hast given Me are of Thee' (vv. 6, 7). This message, again, was expressed in 'words' (v. 8) given Him by the Father, and given, in an especial sense, to the twelve. They received them: they knew of a truth, because of this, that Christ came forth from God: and, likewise in moral sequence, believed that God had sent Him. This knowledge, which entered into heart and life, and was not merely ideological, was indeed to them, as to us, eternal life. They received the words, they knew the Person, they believed in the mission from the Father. Thus they came to know God, and entered into that fellowship of love expressed in all these active relations. Through that Word they would be kept in the Father's Name, preserved in the world, and become witnesses to lead others to faith in Christ.

This interpretation of His mission, made by Christ Himself in so sacred a manner, is concurrently held by those very apostles. John, speaking for his associates, says, 'That eternal life . . . was manifested unto us. WE have seen it. WE beheld His glory'. The validity of their experience and witness is the foundation of all subsequent preaching. The Twelve, through beholding the glory of the incarnate Word, are brought into fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ: then, through the apostolic witness later generations of believers are brought into that same fellowship, to share that same joy and to bear like witness in the world. Christ prayed for those that should believe on Him 'through their word'. They themselves declared, 'We bear witness, we show unto you that which we have seen and heard . . . that ye also may have fellowship with us'. The whole long process is harmonised into a divine unity crowned with glory.

The power by which all this became operative was that of the Holy Spirit. What the Lord here speaks in prayer to the Father, 'As Thou didst send Me into the world, even so sent I them into the world (v. 18. R.V.)' is later spoken directly to the apostles, 'As the Father hath sent Me, so send I you (c. 20: v.21)', and with these words He breathed on them and said to

them, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost'. This links John 17 and John 20 with Pentecost. Is not this link implicit also in the special use of 'glory' and 'glorify' in John's Gospel? Refer to John 7:39. And in the light of this verse, as well as the immediate context, consider the words, 'Glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee', and 'the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given unto them; that they may be one'. For it is by the coming of the Holy Spirit that we have been made one and brought into this divine fellowship. The complete fulfilment of this experience is doubtless reserved until that day when we shall be with Him where He is and behold His glory, but the fact of it is made real to us now by the same Holy Spirit, and is the power for witness in the world that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The divine fellowship is presented in John as a mutual indwelling. We are in Him, and therefore share in the joy and blessedness of His love: He also is in us, so that in our lives we may bear fruit to His glory, and that also, through us, He may continue His work among men. The unity of the Father and the Son is an essential one, expressed in perfect harmony of purpose and word and action, and is here put as the prototype of the unity of the Apostolate (v. 11) and of that of ALL believers (v. 21). After mentioning the exclusive witness of the apostles in John 1:14, John hastens to include his hearers with himself in verse 16 and say, 'Of His fulness have ALL WE received'. The apostolic witness may be specialised but the experience it brought was common to all.

John 17 is therefore a great missionary chapter, outlining as it does in broad perspective the conditions under which must be accomplished that great movement, which, initiated by the Lord Himself, has been confirmed unto us by them that heard Him, and though recorded in part in the Acts of the Apostles, continues down into our own day. The sacred deposit is still to be guarded through the Holy Spirit which dwelleth in us. John seventeen is an incentive, not only for worship, but for work. And the contemplation of scheme so vast and comprehensive, so ordered and sure, ought to keep us from that impatience which near views of duty often give us, and certainly ought to dispel all depression arising from narrow temporal circumstances of Christian witness. Victory is sure!