

This is a portion of a larger book. In this version, the Bible texts have been modified into modern English, the punctuation improved, headings and emphasis may have been added, and some sentences realigned.

Chapter 7

The Character of John

The apostle John was distinguished above his brethren as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” [John 19:26] While not in the slightest degree cowardly, weak, or vacillating in character, he possessed an amiable disposition and a warm, loving heart. He seems to have enjoyed, in a pre-eminent sense, the friendship of Christ, and he received many tokens of the Saviour's confidence and love. He was one of the three permitted to witness Christ's glory upon the mount of transfiguration and His agony in Gethsemane; and to the care of John our Lord confided His mother in those last hours of anguish upon the cross.

The Saviour's affection for the beloved disciple was returned with all the strength of ardent devotion. John clung to Christ as the vine clings to the stately pillar. For his Master's sake he braved the dangers of the judgment hall and lingered about the cross; and at the tidings that Christ had risen, he hastened to the sepulcher, in his zeal outstripping even the impetuous Peter.

John's love for his Master was not a mere human friendship, but it was the love of a repentant sinner, who felt that he had been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

He esteemed it the highest honor to work and suffer in the service of his Lord. His love for Jesus led him to love all for whom Christ died. His religion was of a practical character. He reasoned that love to God would be manifested in love to His children.

He was heard again and again to say, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:11). “We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (verses 19,20).

The apostle's life was in harmony with his teachings.

The love which glowed in his heart for Christ, led him to put forth the most earnest, untiring labor for his fellow men, especially for his brethren in the

Christian church. He was a powerful preacher, fervent, and deeply in earnest, and his words carried with them a weight of conviction.

A New Creature Through Grace

The confiding love and unselfish devotion manifested in the life and character of John present lessons of untold value to the Christian church. Some may represent him as possessing this love independent of divine grace; but John had, by nature, serious defects of character; he was proud and ambitious, and quick to resent slight and injury.

The depth and fervor of John's affection for his Master was not the cause of Christ's love for him, but the effect of that love. John desired to become like Jesus, and under the transforming influence of the love of Christ, he became meek and lowly of heart. Self was hid in Jesus. He was closely united to the Living Vine, and thus became a partaker of the divine nature. Such will ever be the result of communion with Christ. This is true sanctification.

There may be marked defects in the character of an individual, yet when he becomes a true disciple of Jesus, the power of divine grace makes him a new creature. Christ's love transforms, sanctifies him. But when persons profess to be Christians, and their religion does not make them better men and better women in all the relations of life--living representatives of Christ in disposition and character--they are none of His.

Lessons in Character Building

At one time John engaged in a dispute with several of his brethren as to which of their number should be accounted greatest. They did not intend their words to reach the ear of the Master; but Jesus read their hearts, and embraced the opportunity to give His disciples a lesson of humility. It was not only for the little group who listened to His words, but was to be recorded for the benefit of all His followers to the close of time. "And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mark 9:35).

Those who possess the spirit of Christ will have no ambition to occupy a position above their brethren. It is those who are small in their own eyes who will be accounted great in the sight of God. "And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me" (verses 36, 37).

What a precious lesson is this for all the followers of Christ! Those who overlook the life duties lying directly in their pathway, who neglect mercy and kindness, courtesy and love, to even a little child, are neglecting Christ. John felt the force of this lesson and profited by it.

On another occasion his brother James and himself had seen a man casting out devils in the name of Jesus, and because he did not immediately connect himself with their company, they decided that he had no right to do this work, and consequently forbade him. In the sincerity of his heart John related the circumstance to his Master. Jesus said, "Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part" (verses 39, 40).

Again, James and John presented by their mother a petition requesting that they might be permitted to occupy the highest positions of honor in Christ's kingdom. The Saviour answered, "Ye know not what ye ask" (Mark 10:38). How little do many of us understand the true import of our prayers! Jesus knew the infinite sacrifice at which that glory must be purchased, when He, "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). That joy was to see souls saved by His humiliation, His agony, and the shedding of His blood.

This was the glory which Christ was to receive, and which these two disciples had requested that they might be permitted to share. Jesus asked them, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can" (Mark 10:38, 39).

How little did they comprehend what that baptism signified! "Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared" (verses 39, 40).

Pride and Ambition Reproved

Jesus understood the motives which prompted the request, and thus reproved the pride and ambition of the two disciples: "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came

not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (verses 42-45).

Upon one occasion Christ sent messengers before Him unto a village of the Samaritans, requesting the people to prepare refreshments for Himself and His disciples. But when the Saviour approached the town, He appeared to be passing on toward Jerusalem. This aroused the enmity of the Samaritans, and instead of sending messengers to invite and even urge Him to tarry with them, they withheld the courtesies which they would have given to a common wayfarer. Jesus never urges His presence upon any, and the Samaritans lost the blessing which would have been granted them had they solicited Him to be their guest.

We may wonder at this uncourteous treatment of the Majesty of heaven, but how frequently are we who profess to be the followers of Christ guilty of similar neglect. Do we urge Jesus to take up His abode in our hearts and in our homes? He is full of love, of grace, of blessing, and stands ready to bestow these gifts upon us; but, like the Samaritans, we are often content without them.

The disciples were aware of the purpose of Christ to bless the Samaritans with His presence; and when they saw the coldness, jealousy, and disrespect shown to their Master, they were filled with surprise and indignation. James and John were especially stirred. That He whom they so highly revered should be thus treated, seemed to them a crime too great to be passed over without immediate punishment. In their zeal they said, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?” (Luke 9:54), referring to the destruction of the Syrian captains and their companies sent out to take the prophet Elijah.

Jesus rebuked His disciples, saying, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them” (verses 55, 56). John and his fellow disciples were in a school in which Christ was teacher. Those who were ready to see their own defects, and were anxious to improve in character, had ample opportunity. John treasured every lesson and constantly sought to bring his life into harmony with the Divine Pattern. The lessons of Jesus, setting forth meekness, humility, and love as essential to growth in grace, and a fitness for his work, were of the highest value to John. These lessons are addressed to us as individuals and as brethren in the church, as well as to the first disciples of Christ.

John and Judas

An instructive lesson may be drawn from the striking contrast between the character of John and that of Judas. John was a living illustration of sanctification. On the other hand, Judas possessed a form of godliness, while his character was more satanic than divine. He professed to be a disciple of Christ, but in words and in works denied Him.

Judas had the same precious opportunities as had John to study and to imitate the Pattern. He listened to the lessons of Christ, and his character might have been transformed by divine grace. But while John was earnestly warring against his own faults and seeking to assimilate to Christ, Judas was violating his conscience, yielding to temptation, and fastening upon himself habits of dishonesty that would transform him into the image of Satan.

These two disciples represent the Christian world.

All profess to be Christ's followers; but while one class walk in humility and meekness, learning of Jesus, the other show that they are not doers of the word, but hearers only. One class are sanctified through the truth; the other know nothing of the transforming power of divine grace. The former are daily dying to self, and are overcoming sin. The latter are indulging their own lusts, and the servants of Satan.

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