

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 8

The Ministry of John

The apostle John passed his early life in the society of the uncultivated fishermen of Galilee. He did not enjoy the training of the schools; but by association with Christ, the Great Teacher, he obtained the highest education which mortal man can receive. He drank eagerly at the fountain of wisdom, and then sought to lead others to that “well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). The simplicity of his words, the sublime power of the truths he uttered, and the spiritual fervor that characterized his teachings gave him access to all classes.

Yet even believers were unable to fully comprehend the sacred mysteries of divine truth unfolded in his discourses. He seemed to be constantly imbued with the Holy Spirit. He sought to bring the thoughts of the people up to grasp the unseen. The wisdom with which he spoke, caused his words to drop as the dew, softening and subduing the soul.

After the ascension of Christ, John stands forth a faithful, ardent laborer for the Master. With others he enjoyed the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and with fresh zeal and power he continued to speak to the people the words of life. He was threatened with imprisonment and death, but he would not be intimidated.

Multitudes of all classes come out to listen to the preaching of the apostles, and are healed of their diseases through the name of Jesus, that name so hated among the Jews. The priests and rulers are frantic in their opposition as they see that the sick are healed and Jesus is exalted as the Prince of life. They fear that soon the whole world will believe on Him, and then accuse them of murdering the Mighty Healer. But the greater their efforts to stop this excitement, the more believe on Him and turn from the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. They are filled with indignation, and laying hands on Peter and John, thrust them into the common prison. But the angel of the LORD, by night, opens the prison doors, brings them forth, and says, “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20).

With fidelity and earnestness John bore testimony for his LORD upon every suitable occasion. He saw that the times were full of peril for the church. Satanic delusions were existing everywhere. The minds of the people were

wandering through the mazes of skepticism and deceptive doctrines. Some who pretended to be true to the cause of God were deceivers. They denied Christ and His gospel and were bringing in damnable heresies and living in transgression of the divine law.

John's Favorite Theme

John's favorite theme was the infinite love of Christ. He believed in God as a child believes in a kind and tender father. He understood the character and work of Jesus; and when he saw his Jewish brothers [and sisters] groping their way without a ray of the Sun of Righteousness to illuminate their path, he longed to present to them Christ, the Light of the world.

The faithful apostle saw that their blindness, their pride, superstition, and ignorance of the Scriptures were riveting upon their souls fetters which would never be broken. The prejudice and hatred against Christ which they obstinately cherished, was bringing ruin upon them as a nation and destroying their hopes of everlasting life. But John continued to present Christ to them as the only way of salvation. The evidence that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah was so clear that John declares no man needs to walk in the darkness of error while such light is proffered him.

Saddened by Poisonous Errors

John lived to see the gospel of Christ preached far and near, and thousands eagerly accepting its teachings. But he was filled with sadness as he perceived poisonous errors creeping into the church. Some who accepted Christ claimed that His love released them from obedience to the law of God. On the other hand, many taught that the letter of the law should be kept, also all the Jewish customs and ceremonies, and that this was sufficient for salvation, without the blood of Christ. They held that Christ was a good man, like the apostles, but denied His divinity. John saw the dangers to which the church would be exposed, should they receive these ideas, and he met them with promptness and decision.

He wrote to a most honorable helper in the gospel, a lady of good repute and extensive influence:

“Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresses, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, has not God. He that abides in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and

the Son. If there come any to you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 7-11).

John was not to prosecute his work without great hindrances. Satan was not idle. He instigated evil men to cut short the useful life of this man of God, but holy angels protected him from their assaults. John must stand as a faithful witness for Christ. The church in its peril needed his testimony.

By misrepresentation and falsehood the emissaries of Satan had sought to stir up opposition against John and against the doctrine of Christ. In consequence dissensions and heresies were imperiling the church. John met these errors unflinchingly. He hedged up the way of the adversaries of truth. He wrote and exhorted, that the leaders in these heresies should not have the least encouragement. There are at the present day evils similar to those that threatened the prosperity of the early church, and the teachings of the apostle upon these points should be carefully heeded. “You must have charity [love],” is the cry to be heard everywhere, especially from those who profess sanctification. But charity is too pure to cover an unconfessed sin. John's teachings are important for those who are living amid the perils of the last days. He had been intimately associated with Christ, he had listened to His teachings and had witnessed His mighty miracles. He bore a convincing testimony, which made the falsehoods of His enemies of none effect.

No Compromise With Sin

John enjoyed the blessing of true sanctification.

But mark, the apostle does not claim to be sinless; he is seeking perfection by walking in the light of God's countenance. He testifies that the man who professes to know God, and yet breaks the divine law, gives the lie to his profession. “He that says, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4).

In this age of boasted liberality these words would be branded as bigotry.

But the apostle teaches that while we should manifest Christian courtesy, we are authorized to call sin and sinners by their right names – that this is consistent with true charity.

While we are to love the souls for whom Christ died, and labour for their salvation, we should not make a compromise with sin. We are not to unite with the rebellious, and call this charity. God requires His people in this age of the

world to stand, as did John in his time, unflinchingly for the right, in opposition to soul-destroying errors.

No Sanctification Without Obedience

I have met many who claimed to live without sin. But when tested by God's word these persons were found to be open transgressors of His holy law. The clearest evidences of the perpetuity and binding force of the fourth commandment failed to arouse the conscience. They could not deny the claims of God, but ventured to excuse themselves in breaking the Sabbath. They claimed to be sanctified, and to serve God on all days of the week. Many good people, they said, did not keep the Sabbath. If men were sanctified, no condemnation would rest upon them if they did not observe it. God was too merciful to punish them for not keeping the seventh day. They would be counted singular in the community should they observe the Sabbath, and would have no influence in the world. And they must be subject to the powers that be.

A lady in New Hampshire bore her testimony in a public meeting that the grace of God was ruling in her heart and that she was wholly the LORD's. She then expressed her belief that this people were doing much good in arousing sinners to see their danger. She said, "The Sabbath that this people present to us is the only Sabbath of the Bible"; and then stated that her mind had been very much exercised upon the subject. She saw great trials before her, which she must meet if she kept the seventh day.

The next day she came to meeting and again bore her testimony, saying she had asked the LORD if she must keep the Sabbath, and He had told her she need not keep it. Her mind was now at rest upon that subject. She then gave a most stirring exhortation for all to come to the perfect love of Jesus, where there was no condemnation to the soul.

This woman did not possess genuine sanctification. It was not God who told her that she could be sanctified while living in disobedience to one of His plain commandments. God's law is sacred, and none can transgress it with impunity. The one who told her that she could continue to break God's law and be sinless was the prince of the powers of darkness – the same who told Eve in Eden, through the serpent, "You shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). Eve flattered herself that God was too kind to punish her for disobedience of His express commands. The same sophistry is urged by thousands in excuse of their disobedience of the fourth commandment. Those who have the mind of Christ will keep all of God's commandments, irrespective of circumstances. The Majesty of heaven says, "I have kept my Father's commandments" (John 15:10).

Adam and Eve dared to transgress the LORD's requirements, and the terrible result of their sin should be a warning to us not to follow their example of disobedience. Christ prayed for His disciples in these words: "Sanctify them through your truth: your word is truth" (John 17:17). There is no genuine sanctification except through obedience to the truth. Those who love God with all the heart will love all His commandments also. The sanctified heart is in harmony with the precepts of God's law; for they are holy, just, and good.

God Has Not Changed

God's character has not changed. He is the same jealous God today as when He gave His law upon Sinai and wrote it with His own finger on the tables of stone. Those who trample upon God's holy law may say, "I am sanctified"; but to be indeed sanctified, and to claim sanctification, are two different things.

The New Testament has not changed the law of God.

The sacredness of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment is as firmly established as the throne of Jehovah. John writes: "Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And you know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abides in him sins not: whosoever sins {transgresses the law} has not seen him, neither known him" (1 John 3: 4-6). We are authorized to hold in the same estimation as did the beloved disciple those who claim to abide in Christ, to be sanctified, while living in transgression of God's law. He met with just such a class as we have to meet. He said, "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that commits sin is of the devil; for the devil sins from the beginning" (verses 7, 8). Here the apostle speaks in plain terms, as he deemed the subject demanded.

The epistles of John breathe a spirit of love.

But when he comes in contact with that class who break the law of God and yet claim that they are living without sin, he does not hesitate to warn them of their fearful deception. "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 cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:6-10).