

LOVE AND DOCTRINE

2 JOHN.—This epistle brings out a few things about "love," which it is important to recognize. "Love" in the world is one thing; "love" according to the ideal of the sects another; and the "love" of apostolic discourse yet another. The two former we may dismiss. The world's "love" is an ephemeral affair, having its foundation in the instincts, dying with use and age, and passing away in death. Orthodox "love" is a sickly distortion, lacking the elements that give strength and comeliness to the "love" of the Scriptures. It works spiritual mischief now, and is destined hereafter to vanish like smoke. The "love" of John's epistles has foundations, without which it cannot exist. This partly comes out in the very first sentence of this second epistle: "*The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love IN THE TRUTH.*" Outside the truth, a brother's love is not operative. He loves not the world, neither the things that are in the world, remembering that if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). His friendships are bounded by the truth, as regards both men and things. In Christ, he is a "*new creature*" (2 Cor. 5:17). After the flesh he knows no man. The friendship of the world is enmity with God (Jas. 4:4). Therefore he cultivates no friendship with those who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. His love is bounded by the truth.

Does he, therefore, shut up his bowels of compassion against those who are without God? By no means. He recognizes the obligation put upon him by the same law, to salute not his brethren only, but to do good unto all men, as he has opportunity, even to his enemies. But there is a difference between doing good to unbelievers and cultivating friendship with them; and the saint is careful to observe this difference, lest he come under the rebuke that greeted the ears of Jehoshaphat, on his return from friendly co-operation with Ahab: "*Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord*" (2 Chron. 19:2). We can have our conversation towards the world in all courtesy and benevolence, without going on to their ground, and joining affinity in schemes of pleasure, profit or friendship.

The "love" that belongs to the household of faith is "*for the truth's sake, that dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.*" This is John's definition of its source and scope. Everyone that is truly of the household, responds instinctively to it. To the carnal mind it appears very "narrow," but this is an illusion of ignorance. It is the true breadth, for it relates to that which **shall be for ever**, while the world, which would have us unequally yoked, passeth away. The truth connects us with "the shoreless ocean of eternity," while the friendship of the world is confined to "a narrow neck of land"—the brief existence of this animal probation. The at present "narrow" operation of apostolic "love" is also founded in wisdom; for unrestricted friendship with the world is full of danger: it draws away from the fear of God, the hope of the calling, and the holiness of the Master's house, "*whose house are we, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.*" It is therefore a snare; pleasant and advantageous meantime, but having the suction of the maelstrom with it, drawing us to death; for when the Lord of Light stands on earth, to set in order destiny, according to the Father's purpose, the world will have, from his presence, "fled away."

John rejoiced concerning those to whom he wrote that he had found them "*walking in the truth.*" Saints walk not otherwise. Their actions, plans of life, friendships, aims, enterprises, hopes—everything connected with them, in some way or other comes from, originates in, and is conformed to the truth. The truth is their inspiration—the controlling energy. "*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature*"—not that all answer to this. There are professors who serve not the Lord Jesus, but themselves; but such are abortions and bastards. None but sons will be gathered in the day of the 144,000. They are few now, as they have always been, and the world "knoweth" them not in many senses; but they know what they are about. They are not dreaming; they are not fanatics. They are the children of wisdom; and wisdom is justified of them all, though they may be hard to read sometimes. They understand the world too well to be entrapped into its fellowship. They are known of God, and will be publicly revealed in due time, in glory, honour and immortality. Meanwhile they "*walk in the truth.*" On this ground they are to be met and understood. Approached on any other ground, they will seem not what they are. They are not to be comprehended "*after the flesh.*"

"*This is love,*" says John, "*that we walk after his commandments.*" No man loves after the Spirit's fashion who disobeys. Apostolic "love" is that state of enlightenment and appreciation in relation to the things of God that impels a man to be "*a doer of the word.*" John gives this an application that was special to his day; and yet is at all times appropriate wherever the same need and the same danger manifest themselves. "This is the commandment," he says, "*that AS ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.*" We are wondering what he means when presently the light dawns; "*for many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus is come in the flesh.*" He means that they should hold fast to the doctrine of Christ as originally delivered; because many were drawing the disciples away therefrom. The obedience of this commandment is the evidence of New Testament "love," and it is also necessary for our acceptable standing before the presence of the Lord's glory at his coming. This is John's view, as evident from the words immediately following: "***Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.***" There would have been no need for these words if the things that had been "wrought" were not imperilled by the doctrine of the deceivers of which he is speaking..

He indicates, in strong language, the consequences to the individual ensnared by the deceivers: "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God.*" This may seem a strange saying in view of the fact that the "deceivers" referred to believed in one God, the Creator of heaven and earth; and also in Christ, after their own fashion. But the apparent strangeness disappears when we look closely at the matter John is writing about. To "have" God in the sense of John's words, is to stand in His favour, both now and hereafter. All things are in His goodness. As David says, "*Thy goodness is over all thy works*": but the goodness of God in common benefits that come upon all alike, is a different thing from that personal "favour" which guides, attends, and prospers (even if by chastisement), with a view to a perpetual sonship in the spirit-nature. The enjoyment of this favour is a thing of conditions. One of those conditions is a recognition of the channel in which He offers it. Out of Christ, sinners cannot come near. They have the goodness of God as creatures, like the sparrows, not one of which can fall to the earth without the Father's knowledge; but they are not in the privilege of children. They have not the Father's

favour and purpose concerning the ages to come. This is only to be enjoyed in Christ; but even here, it must be the Christ of God's appointing. Any other than this is presumption, and a mockery of His wisdom: and they who teach otherwise than the truth concerning Christ, preach another Christ, though it be intended to refer to the Christ of Nazareth. This is evident from the case of those to whom John is referring. They believed that the person known as Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ; but in their reasonings upon him, they reasoned away the truth about him, and consequently believed and preached another Jesus than the Son of the Father. There were different sorts of the class, but all their heresies had a common origin in an attempt to bring the mystery of godliness within the rules of human reason, instead of accepting the testimony with humble and childlike simplicity. One set argued that such a character as Jesus was a moral impossibility in flesh and blood, and that, therefore, his whole life was a mere accommodation on the part of a spiritual being to the senses of mortals. Another, believing him to be flesh and blood, philosophized in a contrary direction, concluding that as such, he must, from the nature of things, have been a "mere man," and that the idea of his being God in flesh-manifestation, was preposterous. The Papacy blended the two and taught that though flesh, his flesh was not the corrupt and mortal flesh of men, but a superior, clean, "immaculate" sort. In our own day, as recent painful experience has made us aware, a class of believers are treading the same dangerous ground, in teaching that the flesh of Jesus was destitute of that which, in the flesh of his brethren, constitutes the cause or source of mortality.

In relation to all of them, John's declaration reveals the mind of the Spirit: "*Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, **hath not God.** He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.*" The doctrine of Christ is that he is God made and manifested in the mortal flesh of Abraham's race for the deliverance thereof, on His own principles, from "that having the power of death." Those who hold fast to this have both the Father and the Son; for in Jesus, they have the Son, and the Father manifest in him.

As to those who "*bring not this doctrine,*" John's commandment is "*Receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed!*" This command we can no more evade than any other commandment delivered unto us. The obedience of it may cost us something. It is crucifying to the flesh to refuse friends—some of them excellent people as human nature goes—who in one way or other have been seduced from their allegiance to the doctrine of Christ; but there is no alternative. Friends are but for a moment; the truth is for ever; and if we sacrifice our duty to the latter from regard to the former, the latter will sacrifice us in the day of its glory, and hand us over to the destiny of the flesh, which, as the grass, will pass away.

"*He that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*" This applies to all without distinction, and erects a barrier to fellowship with even some who hold the truth; for though they may hold the doctrine of Christ themselves, yet, if they keep up a "*God-speed*" connection with those who do not, by John's rule they make themselves partakers with them, and, therefore, cut themselves off from those who stand for the doctrine of Christ.

The epistle, as a whole, is singularly applicable to the situation in which we find ourselves this morning. We have been obliged to stand aside for the doctrine of Christ from some we love. The Epistle of John justifies us in our course, both as

regards those who have departed from the doctrine of Christ, and those who, while holding on to it themselves, see not their way to break connection with those who have departed. It is a painful situation, but we must not falter, nor need we fear or be discouraged. God is with us in the course of obedience, and we shall see His blessing in the increase, in our midst, of zeal and holiness, and love and preparedness for the great day of the Lord, which is at hand.

(*“Seasons of Comfort”* , Robert Roberts.)