Revelation 2:14 (Tim Totems) 68873

Bible Treasury: Volume 17, Balaam, On the Doctrine of (2:14)

It is a very blessed thing, and a great relief to the saints in Christ, that the path of His sheep is so simple in the mercy and goodness of God. On the one hand there is Christ, Whose voice they know, and Whom they follow as their good shepherd: on the other hand there are strangers, however numerous and various, whose voice they do not know, and whom they will not follow. And the simplest way to detect a stranger's voice is by its contrariety to that of the Good Shepherd.

But while in the knowledge of Christ as our shepherd, strangers, as such, are detected, yet for their particular judgment as they arise and are about to arise, as also for the further security of the saints, it has seemed well unto God to designate them and their followers under sundry characters.

It is rather in connection with the actual necessities and trials of the saints that these things are brought out, than as subjects of profit apart from those trials.

It does not appear the way of God either to dwell upon corrupt evils which do not lie in the way of His saints, or to omit those by which they are in some way endangered, though the reverse of this course sometimes pleases the flesh and leaves the conscience undisturbed.

To dwell on the pure doctrine of Christ is very sweet and comforting to those who know and love Him. Not so with false doctrines and evil people; yet the faithful testimony of the word of Christ about it is wholesome and needful, and the presenting of that testimony may be a service of love ministered in due season, and the fruit of such righteousness may be very peaceful.

Personal feelings should not be allowed to hinder from a course of faithfulness to Christ.

When He addressed the declining churches in Rev. He first acknowledged and commended the good that was there; but He did not overlook the bad of which His servants stood in need of warning or reproof. And as to the circumstances connected with that need, it is to be remarked in the addresses to those seven churches, that the two churches which are not spoken to as assailed by certain special evil persons are the two worst—the church in Sardis, which had a name to live and was dead, and the church in Laodicea, which was lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot. In those churches where the Spirit of the Lord was most in energy, there the wicked one stirred up a counter-energy in special positive opposers: there were those who said they were apostles and were not; there were the Nicolaitanes, whose deeds were worthy of being hated; there were those who said they were Jews and were not—those who held the doctrine of Balaam, and that woman Jezebel who called herself a prophetess.

I would now make a few remarks connected with the doctrine of Balaam and those who hold it, having long desired to do so, and believing such to be one of the special trials of the saints through the power of the enemy and the work of the flesh in this place (Demerara).

It is important to notice in the addresses to the church in Pergamos, that Christ does not charge those that hold fast His name with also holding fast the doctrine of Balaam; neither does He give any credit to those who hold fast1 the doctrine of Balaam for holding fast His name also: but He totally disconnects the two parties.

In the doctrine of Balaam there is a strange voice, and Christ's sheep will not own it. “A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers.”

He blames His own people for allowing the others among them at all. “I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold (or hold fast) the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.” “Repent; or else I am coming unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:14-16). He says, “I am coming onto thee, and will fight (not against thee, but) against them.”

As to the doctrine itself, it is “the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balac.” It is not the case of a man overtaken in a fault: nor is it the case of those who having committed sin are ready to confess and mourn over it as sin in the presence of the Lord; but it is the ease of those who hold fast sin in the shape of a doctrine. This is a very important distinction. It is the doctrine of Balaam, though I do not believe that those who held it made an open acknowledgment of Balaam in it any more than the Jews did of their father the devil, when they were doing his works and boasting in the names of the children of Abraham and the children of God. But names cannot alter things.

The doctrine is the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. What is it to eat things sacrificed unto idols? Eating is an emblem of participation and communion. As to the idols, we know that covetousness is idolatry: and those things which do not minister to the glory of God, but which yet are delighted in because they minister to what an evil heart of unbelief puts its dependence on instead of putting it on God, are things sacrificed to idols. Therefore, while the scriptures teach that the love of money is the root of all evil, the doctrine of Balaam teaches the very opposite, that it not only is no harm at all, but that it is prudent and praiseworthy. The scripture also teaches that women should adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works (see 1 Tim 9, 10). Such is the doctrine of the sacred scriptures; but whose doctrine is it that teaches that if women acted thus, they would be neglecting their future prospects in life, and that as for this shamefacedness and sobriety, that at least it is not to be valued, but that broidered hair, gold, pearls, and costly array are, more or less, proper adornments? Whose doctrine is

this? Is it the doctrine of Christ? But then a person may say, We can hold the doctrine of Christ too. But what does Christ say to His servants? “I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam.” The holders of this doctrine might like to be among those who held Christ's name: but Christ does not allow it. He tells His servants that He is coming to fight against the holders of this doctrine, and that they cannot have such among them.

In the teaching of this doctrine there is also taught to commit fornication. What! Is this a doctrine taught? Yes! It is the doctrine of Balaam, though it may be in a more refined form to deceive the world. I would here quote the words of Christ in Matt. 5:27, 28, marking that it is the doctrine of Balaam that sets those words aside, “Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” The doctrine of Balaam may say that this is no harm, that it is quite innocent. But it need not be said to the faithful in Christ Jesus, “Do not hold such doctrine,” yet it may be needful to say, “Have no fellowship with those who hold it.” Christ is coming to fight against them with the sword of His mouth. If you have an ear to hear, hear what the Spirit saith mite the churches.

I will quote a few scriptures, most important to those who would take heed of the leaven of this doctrine.

Heb. 13:4. “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” In what connection does this scripture stand? It comes as a solemn warning against the flesh after the saints had been called to such services of grace, as brotherly love continuing, entertaining strangers, feeling bound with those in bonds: but lest the flesh should come in under the pretext of preserving the continuance of brotherly love, or of the kindly hospitality of entertaining strangers, or of tender sympathy with those in bonds, the apostle immediately adds, “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” The doctrine of Balaam in connection with a formal but false profession of Christ, would make a pretext of brotherly love or Christian hospitality for unclean liberties, which even in the world would not be allowed.

1 Tim. 5:1, 2. “Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.” To whom are these last words, “with all purity,” referred? Let those who would judge the doctrine of Balaam see! The Spirit of God does not give a precept where it is not needed, neither does He withhold one where it is needed. It is the way of the flesh often to do the very reverse. Even Timothy needed this caution!

Titus 2:1-10. In this scripture Titus is instructed by the Apostle in reference to aged men, aged women, young women, young men, and servants; of these five divisions four only are immediately referred to Titus: one of them is not personally committed to him, but to the aged women!

Let the godly take warning in fear and trembling.

How often do aged sisters say, “I am not able to do anything for the Lord.” This is a wrong word for any one who knows Him to say: but let the aged sisters know that their age and sex constitute them fit and proper persons to be servants for Christ in many things of great need to some of the exposed ones of His flock.

The godly should not make light of these reserves of manner and watchfulness in the sight of God who has by His Spirit given us the exhortations; and through His grace they will not do so. We will find the experience of every day vindicating the wisdom of God in such words, whether it be in the consistency of those who hold them though often sore beset with trials, or in the failure and breaking down of those who lightly esteem them.

Shocking must it be to those who tremble at God's word, and are the pure in heart, who see Him by faith, to witness the sinful liberties that are too often to be met with under the excuses of “play.” So it is play: but remember “The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.” And this scripture is quoted by the apostle in warning to us, immediately before the scripture of warning from the scene at Baal-Peon. “Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.” In this scripture they who hold the doctrine of Christ are warned against the deeds maintained in the doctrine of Balaam: for the saints need to watch against the flesh in those things which their spiritual judgments and consciences condemn.

One more reference to scripture I would make in consequence of having heard it said, “Why do you make more of this sin than of any other?” An awful word! But the apostle says, “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body [and in your spirit, which are God's]” (1 Cor. 6:18-20).

In Acts 15 the brethren were bid to abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication. Why is fornication put here with other things? Because it is the offense to the church of God as blood would be to the Jews, or things offered to idols to the Gentiles: for the character of the church is that of a chaste virgin for, Christ (2 Cor. 11:2, comp. Matt. 25:1, Rev. 19:7). And therefore, while in abstaining from things offered to idols, it would be for conscience not thine own but of another (1 Cor. 10); it would, on the other hand, be for conscience thine own in the fullest possible sense in abstaining from fornication of the slightest degree.

May His blessing attend those few remarks for Christ's sake and to His glory. Amen. T. T.

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