

SPEAKING BOLDLY AT THE BATH HOUSE:

The Apostle John (d. AD 101)



There have been many great and godly men named John down through church history, but the one I want to tell you about here is the Apostle John. In the gospel that he wrote, he often called himself “the disciple who Jesus loved,” but he had other names—for one thing, Jesus himself called John and his brother James “Boanerges,” which means “sons of thunder,” because of their hot tempers. And In church history, he is often called John the Evangelist.

John lived longer than most of the other apostles, many of whom were killed when they were still fairly young. But though John was not martyred for his faith, in some ways he had an even greater trial to endure. The Bible tells us that God's enemy, the devil, "prowls around like a lion" seeking to destroy true believers. He likes to appear "as an angel of light" to deceive people—and he has many, many followers, who have turned away from God's truth and instead join with the devil in trying to hurt God's people. Even in the very early years, false teachers were sneaking into the church, inventing pretty-sounding lies to lead people away from the truth. The New Testament was not yet all written down, so it was harder for Christians to know just what was true about some very important doctrines, which were new and wonderful, but also sometimes difficult to understand.

These false teachers claimed to be "Christian," but denied things that the Bible taught, and had very clever arguments for what they were teaching. Like many men and women today, they weren't content just to say "I don't believe Christianity is true" and walk away. They did not want to turn their backs on Christianity entirely, even though they didn't like what Jesus Christ said about themselves or their sins. Unfortunately, instead of admitting that they were wrong, they took a few things that they liked from

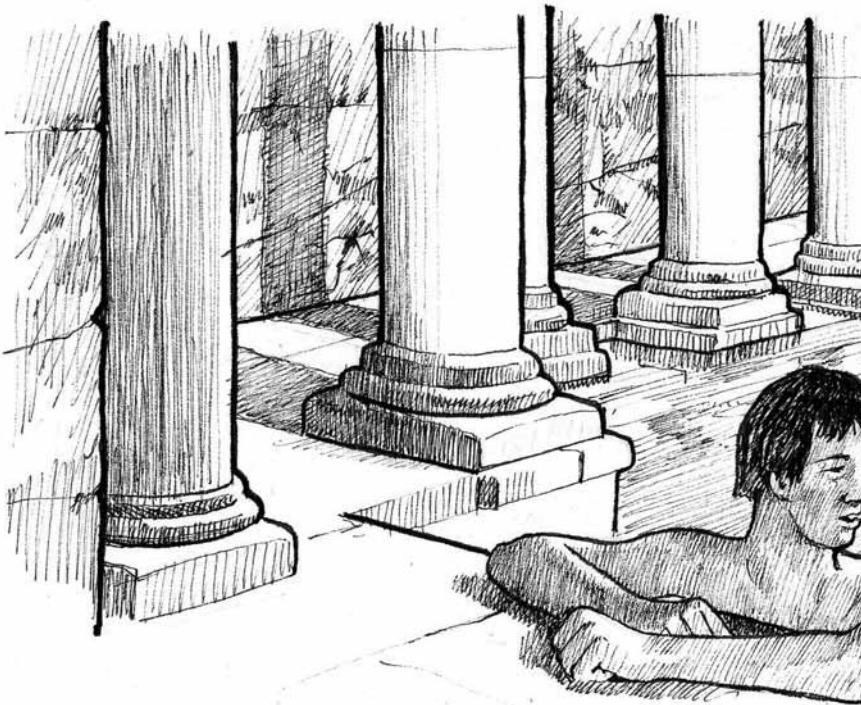
Scripture and then mixed in a bunch of their own bad ideas. This still happens today. In the early days of Christianity these bad ideas were often called “new revelations” or “secret truths” by the wicked men who invented them. There were lots of different people who taught that you could find secret knowledge through them, and they were called “Gnostics” (Nah-sticks), which is from a Greek word for knowledge. The church eventually saw that the teachings of the Gnostics were heresies. Heresies are teachings that are so harmful that to receive and believe them will lead to eternal damnation (2 Peter 2:1). So, being a teacher of heresies (a heretic) was a deadly serious thing. It meant you were teaching people things that would lead them to hell, and that you yourself were under God’s angry judgment.

When John was still alive, he had to fight against some of these false teachers, or heretics. John loved the Lord Jesus above anybody, and he hated it when someone came along and told lies about who he was. One of the men that did this was named Cerinthus (Sir-enth-us). Cerinthus taught that Jesus wasn’t really the Christ, the Son of God, but just a human man, and that something called the “christ spirit” had lived in Him for a little while, but then left Him at the end, so that He died as just a normal man. The Gospel of John and the short letters of John teach the truth about Jesus, against the lies of Gnostics like

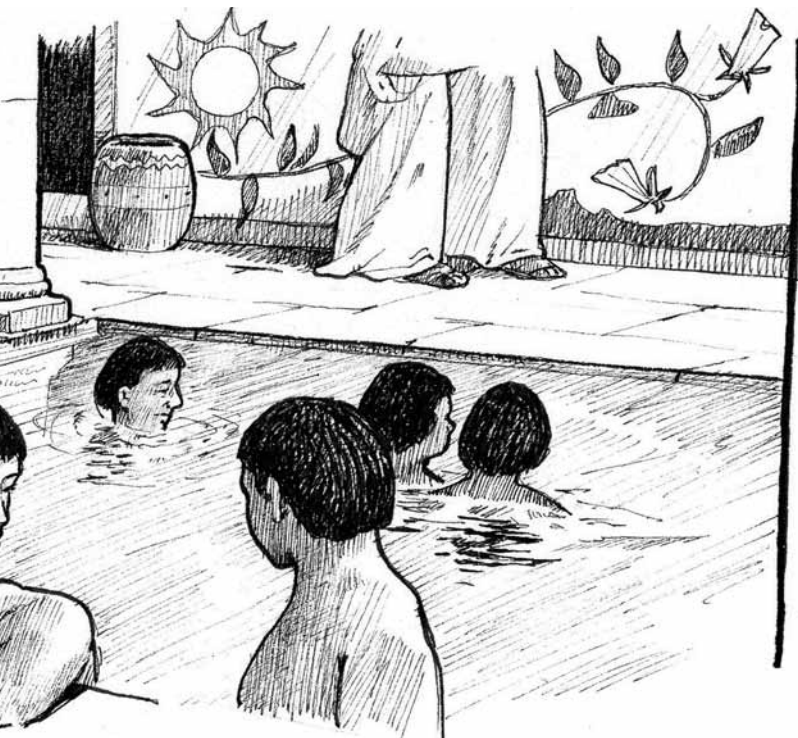
FAKING LIONS

Cerinthus. However, this false teacher continued to ignore the truth and teach his lies. When you read the Gospel of John, you can't help but notice how often he mentions God's love for mankind, and John has even been called the Apostle of love, because he cared so much for believers and unbelievers alike. But John was also that "son of thunder" in some ways, and he knew that God's wrath against those who reject his Son is very real.

John had a young friend and disciple named Polycarp, who told of one time when John's love for God's truth and hatred of false teaching made him



refuse to take a bath! In the days when the Apostles lived in the Roman Empire, people didn't take baths as often as we do today, but when they did, they went to a place in town where the men bathed in one area and the women in another. It was sort of like an indoor swimming pool or hot tub, but a public one where you never knew who you might run into. One day, John went to the bath with some of his friends. But as they started to prepare to get in, they saw Cerinthus! John had warned believers about not letting dangerous false teachers into their house or church to try to peddle their lies: "If anyone comes to



you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 10-11 NKJV). Well, John wasn’t in his own house that day, so he couldn’t shut the door in Cerinthus’ face—but he certainly didn’t greet him! He didn’t just pretend not to see him, either. In fact, John took Cerinthus’ lies so seriously, that when he saw him there, he turned and bolted for the nearest exit, urging his friends to come along, “before the bath-house falls down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is in here!”

Now, as far as we know God was merciful to his enemy that day and didn’t bring the bath house down on his head, but from this story we get a glimpse of how strongly John the Evangelist felt about those who told lies about his Savior.

Even after John had grown old and died, he continued to “fight on” through his writings, and also through the men he had trained to be future leaders in the church there in Asia Minor.