

Series: The Confident, Loving Church – week 27

CDOBC – beginning on 2/14/10

Title: “The Pastor’s Fear”

2 John 7-13 ~ September 26, 2010

OBJECTIVE: To help believers discern false teachers and to avoid them.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Clothing Exchange – Oct. 9th
- Youth Night – Sept. 26
- Welcome Class – Oct. 6 & 13
- Baptism – Oct. 10th
- Step-Family Ministry – Tom Carlson

Last week I talked about the Pastor’s Joy (2 John 1-6) which is that the church embraces the truth and love of God. This week, I’ve titled the message “The Pastor’s Fear (2 John 7-13) which is that the church will wander away from the truth and love of God.

In the 1st century, the church grew at a tremendous rate, as the Gospel spread throughout the known world. One of the common occurrences in the early church was the practice of preachers that would travel from town to town to minister to the local churches they would find there. The Jerusalem council operated as a central authority for a time (Acts 15), but towards the end of the first century there was no way to check the credentials of a traveling pastor / missionary. There were no “UL Listing”, no “Good Housekeeping Seal”, no “Better Business Bureau”, no “Angie’s List” for local churches to check out if a traveling speaker / pastor is loyal to the Gospel of Christ. Because of this, a problem arose - *How could the believers in a local church determine if someone was led by the Spirit of God – or if they were led by the spirit of antichrist?*

In 1 John 4:2, John had given a standard for determining this:

1 John 4:2-3 – “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is

not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”

John was not the only N.T. writer to do this – many other writers did also...this was a major issue in the early years of the church. A teacher’s view of Christ – their Christology – was a vital evaluation tool for churches – but John needed to explain how all this should work on a practical level. The local churches throughout the region of Asia Minor needed direction on how to deal with those who claimed the name of Christ – yet they taught a message that was different from the Apostolic Gospel.

Another historical point to know is that when a traveling preacher / missionary would arrive in a city, staying at a hotel was not a safe or wise option. There were no Hilton’s, Hyatt’s, or Holiday Inns in Ephesus, Antioch, Corinth, or Colossae. The hotels that did exist in these ancient cities were dangerous due to robbers and muggers, and they were known for their debauchery...hardly a place a traveling preacher wanted to stay.

So, hospitality was a crucial service and virtue in the Christian community. These preachers and the churches they served depended on the hospitality and generosity of local churches as they would stay for a time to preach and teach the church about Christ.

But not all traveling preachers were Godly men who taught the true message of Christ – and Christ crucified, resurrected, and glorified. A wave of heresy had swept in – an attack by Satan against the church – and his greatest weapon in this attack was a false message about Jesus. Satan’s first attack against the followers of Jesus was killing them off – but this wasn’t discouraging them – it was only strengthening them and increasing their numbers! So his next strategy was an assault on the truth – which by the way – is still one of Satan’s primary strategies against the church!

Last week we looked at the first 6 verses of 2 John – and I mentioned that the truth of Christ – the truth of the Gospel is the primary theme of this short letter. Love is not all we need – our real need is the truth of God – and true, Godly love will follow.

Turn with me to 2 John 7-13

The danger of Christ-deniers vs. 7-9

Read vs. 7-9

The details of their denial vs. 7

2JN 1:7 Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

False teaching was not a small problem...there were “many deceivers” who had “gone out into the world.” They had gone out to evangelize others to their heretical views – and the churches needed to be alerted to the danger. “Deceivers” is a Greek word that literally means ‘wanderer’.

Jude calls false teachers “wandering stars” (vs. 13).

Jesus called them “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Matt. 7:15)

Paul called them “savage wolves” (Acts 20:29), “false apostles”, “deceitful workers”, and says they are “masquerading as apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13).

Paul warned Timothy that some will fall away from the faith and “...follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” (1 Timothy 4:1).

The nature of their denial – of their false teaching is important for us to understand. Their deceit was very specific to the deity and humanity of Christ. They were

denying not only the incarnation of Christ, but the ongoing, eternal incarnation of Christ. In 1 John, the Apostle argued against the false teaching that opposed the incarnation of Jesus.

1 John 4:2-3 – “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God...”

There is a small detail in the text here – in 1 John 4:2, the standard John puts forth to test the spirits is “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” This is in the perfect tense in the Greek – which points to a past action which continuing results. Here, in 2 John 7, the wording is very similar, but John uses a present participle here in speaking of the same issue – the incarnation of Jesus. Why the change? It seems that not only was the incarnation of Jesus under attack, but also the lasting, eternal union of the divine and human natures of Jesus. According to Gnostic teaching, the spirit of the Christ left Jesus prior to His crucifixion – thereby, negating the deity of Jesus. The truth that John is fighting for is that the Word had become flesh – and had remained flesh – and will remain flesh for all eternity.

The Apostle is fighting against the false teaching that denied the eternal incarnation of Jesus.

The damage of their teaching vs. 8-9

Vs. 8 – First, we are told to “Watch out” – be alert – be aware. As Christians, we are not called to a life of passivity and intellectual laziness or indifference, but we must engage our mind to learn the truths in

Scripture – but also to learn discernment so we can detect error when it enters our life.

What does it mean to “lose what you have worked for”?

We do have a clue in the last part of the verse. John’s desire and encouragement is that we would avoid the false teaching so we can have our full reward – which indicated he is not talking about salvation, but our heavenly rewards for being faithful to Christ and His truth.

However, vs. 9 is more challenging...

“runs ahead” has the idea of going outside the limits.

This is further defined for us as the person who “...does not continue in the teaching of Christ”

This teaching refers to the Gospel – the message of Christ that the Apostles taught and the Scripture’s teach. Running ahead has the idea of going beyond what the Bible teaches about Christ – and adding to the Gospel – much like the Galatian Christians had done.

Gal. 4:9-11

“But now...you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles...I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.”

Paul also cautioned the Corinthians no to do this...

1 Cor. 4:6

“...Do not go beyond what is written.”

“False teachers are not content to remain within the confines of Scripture, but invariably add erroneous interpretations, revelations, visions, words as if from the Lord, or esoteric distortions of the biblical text, while claiming to have advanced knowledge, new truth, or hidden wisdom available only to them and the their

followers.” (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1-3 John, by John MacArthur, p. 235)

The truth of God – the commands of God not only insist that we love others – but it also protects us from being misled and abandoning the God who loves us and died for us.

Notice that the person who “...does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God...” – this is a strong statement – but it deals with the greatest offense, the perversion of the Gospel.

If you don't have Christ – you don't have God!

John is not talking about someone who is mistaken or unaware of the Bible's teaching. He is not saying that if you differ with someone in an area of theology that they do not have God. The false teachers he is describing understand exactly what they are teaching – they have heard the Gospel as John and the other Apostles taught – and they have rejected it and have attached themselves to a lie about Christ – and they are trying to convince others to believe their lie about Christ. They deny the incarnation of Christ – they deny the eternal deity and humanity of Christ – they are teaching a different Christ altogether! This is why they don't have God – they don't believe in Jesus Christ! The last part of vs. 9 gives believers the “guardrails” (if you will) to guide their belief. To have both the Father and the Son – we need to believe the Gospel message about Christ. It's that simple (but not simplistic).

Dealing with Christ-deniers vs. 10-11

Read vs. 10-11

John prohibits (two commands here) giving hospitality to false teachers and he even prohibits greeting them!

Many people today will think this is a bit extreme. In fact, some commentators that are normally very orthodox and faithful to Scripture bristle at these verses. The reason that many struggle with this command is they feel it is harsh – and they feel it doesn't allow for them to hear the Gospel and to repent. It is proposed by those who are uncomfortable with this command that love compels us to reach out to these teachers and that our display of love may bring them back to the truth.

A couple of things will help us see the larger picture here.

First, the issue here is not one of ignorance – but one of total and absolute rejection. These false teachers have already heard the Gospel – and they have rejected it and embraced a false Gospel. They have already been confronted about their heretical teaching – and they have ignored those who have tried to show them the error of their ways.

Second, the most loving thing that can happen in this situation is to refuse help to these false teachers. In a secondary way, the refusal of fellowship might cause them to consider their error – but the primary issue is to protect the church and other believers who might be susceptible to their false message.

Illus. If you had young children – would you welcome a child molester into your home?

The double command that not only prohibits hospitality, but also prohibits a warm welcome / greeting – is to withhold any encouragement or support for their deceitful efforts. The stakes in this situation are very high – the truth of God is being protected and protecting the immature in Christ or

those who have never heard about Christ from being misled is the highest priority!

Chairō – “greeting” – lit. means ‘rejoice’ – this was the common Christian greeting. This greeting affirmed solidarity with another believer – they were acknowledging their unity in the family of God. So, it’s understandable that John says not to even welcome / greet a false teacher!

John says turn away from them – shut the door in their face when they show up! Notice also – if you don’t reject them, you become part of his wicked work! *Koinonei*’s with him! Fellowships with him!

Illus. – Why does our culture imprison dangerous criminals – murderers and rapists? To protect the public. These types of criminals are extremely dangerous – and they need to be removed from the streets.

In the same way, false teachers who deliberately teach against Biblical truth are the most dangerous threat to individual believers and to the church at large!

Our learning never stops vs. 12-13

2JN 1:12 I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

2JN 1:13 The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.

“I have much to write to you...” There is so much more that John wants to tell them – to teach them. They were learning and growing in their faith – contending for the truth of the Gospel – but there was more they needed to learn.

“face to face” – *stoma pros stoma* – lit. mouth to mouth – a Greek idiom – we would say eye to eye.
Talking in the presence of one another is truly the best way to work through life.

Aspazomai – “greetings” – different word from the greeting referred to in vs. 10 – this word was a common N.T. word – a technical term used at the end of letters.

Application

Avoid false teachers

It’s easy to invite them into our home through T.V., radio, books, the internet, etc. Be selective with who you listen to and what you read.

There are so many ways we can give hospitality to false teachers today.

Vs. 8 – “Watch Out” – be on guard.

Knowing God’s truth is the key to discernment.

One of the most difficult things for many believers is being able to tell if someone is a false teacher. There is no shortcut here – the only way to develop this ability is through a deepening knowledge of God’s Word.