

## 2 JOHN 4-11

### THE TEACHING ABOUT CHRIST

“I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.”<sup>1</sup>

“**E**veryone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God.” Christians who are willing to jettison or ignore doctrine, thinking that by so doing they demonstrate love for the brothers, are detrimental to the cause of Christ. Love for God is revealed through willingness to obey Christ. Love for God—real love, love motivated by the indwelling Spirit of God—will prove to be greater than every desire for ease that keeps us from confronting error.

The stand of Baptists forebears in days past is the stuff of legends. The actions, often extreme but always taken to maintain doctrinal purity, included advocating separation from parent denominations, such as was the case for the Baptist divine Charles Spurgeon, who resisted doctrinal drift in the Baptist Union of Great Britain. Others imposed strictures against professing Christians willing to tolerate or even to embrace error. The Redstone Baptist Association debarred Alexander Campbell for teaching the heresy of baptismal regeneration and dismissed the Brush Run Baptist Church. These saints from a bygone era were willing to hold individual Christians accountable for their beliefs and actions, accountability that is thought extreme today because of its rarity.

If our forefathers erred on the side of strict discipline in their practise of the Christian Faith, we modern Christians have a tendency to err in the opposite direction through our failure to oppose heretical beliefs and actions that deny the transforming power of our Lord among His people. Undoubtedly some of those preceding us in the Faith were extreme and far too strict in their pursuit of doctrinal and ethical purity, but contemporary saints often appear to exercise scant discernment. We seemingly accept almost any error, if only we are not pushed out of our personal comfort zones.

Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John during the First Century of the Faith. The elder from Smyrna related an account that demonstrated John’s firm insistence upon doctrinal integrity. The aged Apostle went into a bath at Ephesus, and seeing Cerinthus, the Gnostic-Ebionite heretic, within, ran out without bathing, and exclaimed, “Let us flee lest the bath should fall in, as long as Cerinthus, that enemy of truth, is within.”

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Polycarp also related how on another occasion, John met Marcion the Gnostic, who demanded of the Apostle, “Acknowledge us,” to which the Apostle of Love replied, “I acknowledge the first born of Satan.”<sup>2</sup> Such caution was exercised by the apostles and their disciples; they endeavoured to avoid communion, even in word, with any of those that mutilated the truth. These early saints would not give succour to those opposed to Christ Jesus. Paul warned believers, “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” [TITUS 3:10, 11].

When John refers to “the teaching of Christ,” it is important to note that he is not simply referring to a particular account of Jesus’ life and ministry that has been related through the various Gospels; rather, he is referring to the entire corpus of Christology. He is writing about the theological study of the purpose of God as revealed in Christ. *What we believe about Jesus the Christ is vital to how we live.* Focus your attention on the greatly neglected second letter of John as we think about the teaching about Christ.

**THE TEACHING ABOUT CHRIST DEFINES THE FAITH** — “I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it” [2 JOHN 4-6].

The letter is addressed to “the elect lady and her children.” Among saints of prior generations, the view that John was writing a matriarch of the Faith seems to have been prevalent. Some suggested that although her name was unknown, she was clearly esteemed since she is addressed as **eklektē kyria** [“elect lady,” VERSE ONE]. Others have contended that her name was **Kyria** (lady) and that she bore the title of **eklektē**.<sup>3</sup>

More recent students of the Word have suggested that “the elect lady and her children” to whom this missive is addressed are actually a congregation and the individual members of that church.<sup>4</sup> It seems fair to say that the majority of modern scholarship adopts this particular view. Considering all the evidence, I concur that it seems best to understand that John is writing a local congregation, addressing the people of God corporately and the membership of the assembly individually with this letter.

One’s beliefs are revealed through how life is lived. In VERSES FOUR THROUGH SIX, John commends the church he is writing because her members, especially those of whom John is aware, are walking in the truth. How does John know they are walking in the truth? Because they are maintaining the commands of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius Pamphilus, **The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus** (reprint, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1955) 142

<sup>3</sup> See D. Edmond Hiebert, **The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary** (Bob Jones University Press, Greenville, SC 1991) 290-292; A. T. Robertson, **Word Pictures in the New Testament: The General Epistles and the Revelation of John: Volume VI** (Broadman Press, Nashville, TN 1933) 249-250; Henry A. Sawtelle, **An American Commentary on the New Testament: Commentary on the Epistles of John: The Second Epistle of John** (Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA 1888) 67-68

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Daniel L. Akin, **The New American Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John** (Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 2001) 220; David Jackman, **The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of John’s Letters** (Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 1992) 175-176; Marianne Meye Thompson, **The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1–3 John** (Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 1992) 150-151

Jesus taught that love for Him is demonstrated through obedience to what He says. He taught, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” The Master again taught us, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” During that same conversation with the Disciples, Jesus said, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me” [JOHN 14:15, 21, 23, 24].

On one other occasion while instructing the Disciples, Jesus equated love and obedience, pointing to His own relationship to the Father as the example for their obedience. “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” [JOHN 15:10].

Apparently, John learned this lesson well since he stresses this self-same truth. “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” [1 JOHN 5:3].

The plea for us who have professed Christ as Lord of life to live as new people is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament. “Brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:1, 2].

“As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him” [COLOSSIANS 2:6].

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” [EPHESIANS 4:1].

The teaching about Christ defines the Faith and sets the parameters of Christian practise. John could observe that the members of the congregation to which he wrote were walking in the truth because belief is revealed through the way in which we live. Apparently, what defines us as Christians is what we believe concerning Christ the Lord. John concludes that those who fail to confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh are deceivers and opposed to Christ. It would appear vital that we ask what it means to confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh?

First, understand that to confess Christ has come in the flesh denotes an acceptance of the revelation of the Bible as true. The Bible is received by the Christian as a perfect revelation of the True and Living God. This Word serves as a guide for life, given to direct the child of God into the life that pleases the Father. The Word reveals Jesus as the Son of God who gave Himself as a ransom for all that all who believe.

Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah foretold throughout the Old Testament. He is the Son of God, just as David said [cf. PSALM 110:1] and as Isaiah also prophesied [ISAIAH 9:6, 7]. Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate and rose to life through the power of the Spirit of God. Consequently, we are assured that through His death He presented Himself as a sacrifice because of sinful man. We are taught that He was buried and that He has risen from the dead on the third day [see 1 CORINTHIANS 15:3, 4]. All who believe this truth are forever freed from all condemnation before Holy God. All who place their trust in Jesus the Living Son of God are born from above, accepted into the Family of God and forever after enjoy access into the presence of the Father.

Labels do not save anyone; one may herself a Baptist and yet be lost. One is born from above through faith in the Risen Son of God, just as Scripture declares. “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” [EPHESIANS 2:8,9]. That particular portion of the Word continues with the declaration that the lives of those born from above are transformed when it declares, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” [EPHESIANS 2:10].

In our text, John states that all who possess Christ reveal the character of the Father through the way they live. The Apostle Paul likewise becomes quite specific when contrasting the walk of Christians with the walk of those identified with the world. “Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

‘Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.’

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” [EPHESIANS 5:1-17].

Dear people, it is not in professing Christ that one becomes a Christian. Rather, it is in possessing Christ that one is brought into the fellowship of the Living Son of God. Those possessing the Son of God as Master of Life and as Saviour will demonstrate His presence through a godly life of obedience to Him. The Puritans of old were wont to say, “Say not thou hast royal blood in thy veins, save thou durst prove it by a holy life.”

Paul challenged believers, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the Faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you” [2 CORINTHIANS 13:5]? Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God? Is your life guided by its precepts? Are you obedient to the Word? Or do you imagine that your own opinions are of greater worth than what is written in the Word? Do you know that Jesus died because of your sin? Or is His sacrifice merely a story tolerated in order to avoid feeling left out? Are you certain that He has risen for your justification? Are you living in obedience to Him? The teaching about Christ defines the Faith.

**THE TEACHING ABOUT CHRIST DISTINGUISHES THE FAITHFUL** — “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God” [2 JOHN 7-9a].

The professing Christian who fails the test of adhering to the teaching about Christ is not born from above; that one is a false professor. There are not two versions of the Good News about Christ; there is but one Gospel. The message of life is not Christ **and** human effort; the message of life is Christ—Christ alone! The message of the cults always attempts to add to Christ’s provision so that man can feel good about himself.

False professors of the Faith teach that we must believe Christ **and** be baptised, or we must believe Christ **and** hold on to the end, or we must believe Christ **and** perform good works. Error always teaches that it is Christ **and**... The message of the Word is that Christ is sufficient for every need. Those who are willing to concede that in some way people can be perfected through their own efforts need to answer these questions. “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith” [GALATIANS 3:2-5]?

Outsiders race ahead, considering their rush to be acceptable in the eyes of the world as progressive. Boasting of their great learning and of their advanced understanding of human nature and of God’s character, they only demonstrate that they are to be pitied since they have never known the grace of God in Christ the Lord. They want to be thought of as Christian, but they are not Christians. They want to speak of what they do not know, and they want to be teachers when they have never been taught.

I have in prior messages told of a Methodist preacher with whom I became acquainted in Texas. I have related how I began my preaching ministry in a prison farm near Kaufman, Texas. Each Sunday afternoon, I rode my 500 cc Suzuki the forty-five miles from the Trinity Temple Baptist Church to that prison farm, except for the fifth Sunday of those months that had five Sundays. On that particular day, a Methodist preacher who was also enrolled as a seminarian at Southern Methodist University, included as part of his circuit the prison farm.

I travelled to the farm one blustery Sunday when I was not preaching, just so I would be able to see what that preacher taught to the congregation I had adopted. Roland brought his guitar and sang some songs. I was astounded when he told those men that he knew they were good men; he knew they never really meant to hurt anybody. He urged them to try harder, saying that if they only tried harder, they could be good.

Later, I stood freezing in pelting sleet while Roland sat in the warmth of his car and we talked about the Faith of Christ. He professed to be intrigued how I, an apparently educated and intelligent man, could believe the truths I held dear. He did not believe that Jesus was God. He believed the Bible to be inspired in the same way as a Shakespearian play might be inspired. He did not believe there was any such event as being born from above—salvation was what you made of life. He did not believe that man was held accountable before the Lord Christ. For him, there was no heaven or hell.

I was astonished! I had never met a real, live infidel before. Moreover, this infidel was a preacher, professedly in the tradition of John Wesley! I don't believe that Wesley would have tolerated such unbelief among his preachers. I reminded Roland that he had taken vows before a Methodist bishop, and that in those vows he had confessed Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. I asked that preacher how he could now say that he did not believe what he had confessed to believe at an earlier time. He said that he had taken his vows with mental reservations. Somehow, this man had gone on ahead and he no longer remained in the teaching of Christ, if he had ever truly been born from above.

It is of no consequence how many degrees an individual holds, it is of no significance how polished an individual's perorations, if that one does not confess Christ as Lord, he or she is a deceiver and antichrist. Such people think they are advanced in their thinking, but their wickedness is as ancient as the serpent's hiss in the Garden.

It is high time for Christians to identify openly those who fail to embrace truth for who they actually are. John speaks of those who do not abide in the teaching about Christ as "deceivers" and as "antichrist." I do not question the Christian character of those who disagree over church polity—how we conduct our business as Christians. I do not question the commitment to Christ of those who disagree about ecclesiology—the way we worship and the structure of our churches. However, it is not reasonable to accept as fellow Christians anyone who denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This truth is central; it must be embraced and confessed for one to be a Christian.

The reason I speak so pointedly on this issue is that you, the people of God, bear responsibility to assess the accuracy of what is preached from this pulpit or from any pulpit. Should the message delivered appear to be helpful, don't casually accept all that the speaker says. Listen to discover what the speaker believes concerning Christ the Lord. Is He God? Was He born of a virgin? Did He die a sacrificial death? Did He rise from the dead on the third day? Is one forgiven all sin and made new before God through faith in Christ without any human effort? If the speaker fails to adhere to this truth about Christ, be assured that he is not a Christian. Though his presentation be ever so attractive, the message is contaminated. Ingesting such drivel will at the least result in spiritual dyspepsia. Cheesecake, though ever so attractively prepared, if served on a table crawling with blowflies and cockroaches cannot be made sufficiently appetizing that most people would wish to eat it.

In past years I itinerated, conducting evangelistic and revival meetings. On one occasion, I preached a revival meeting at a little country church outside of Lake Charles, Louisiana. As southern folk are wont to do for visiting preachers, I was fêted and dined by the members of the congregation each afternoon and evening despite my requests to the contrary. One evening, I enjoyed a Cajun feast. The repast was an extraordinary culinary delight. I enjoyed vegetables prepared al dente—they were perfect. The family served mustard greens and seafood gumbo over rice. The main course was pork chops stuffed with alligator gar. The meal was excellent, if not unusual.

The home was humble, and like many homes in the swamps, it was infested with cockroaches. The roaches played tag on the stove and on the table at which we were seated. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the warm fellowship and the gracious offering of the best that good family could provide. As the meal neared a conclusion, I took note of a large, mixed breed black dog staring intently at me as I ate the meal. I casually commented to my host, "I must have your dog's seat." "No," replied my host, "you have his plate."

That otherwise excellent meal took an unexpected turn at that point. Just so, when a preacher fails to confess Christ, however attractive all else may appear, his message takes an unexpected and unappetizing turn.

**THE TEACHING ABOUT CHRIST DETERMINES FELLOWSHIP** — “Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” [2 JOHN 9b-11]. Our fellowship is determined by doctrine. We live in a world confused about expressing the Faith. In part, this is because the world has not witnessed the Faith lived out. Christianity is considered a cultural condition that can be changed at will. In the world’s eyes, it has no greater validity, and it may well have less legitimacy, than other philosophical views.

Christians have unfortunately often brought into the church that same laissez faire attitude toward doctrinal truth that infects the inhabitants of this dying world. Quite naturally, we wish to be well-liked, and we are taught from infancy that one must not speak of politics or religion. Thus, the people of God are unwilling to appear bigoted by holding those promoting themselves as teachers of the Faith accountable for what they teach. I contend that it is not a demonstration of love to permit anyone to teach error.

Priscilla and Aquila were able gently to correct Apollos when they discovered that he didn’t quite have the message right. We are told that Apollos “was fervent in spirit” and he “taught accurately the things concerning Jesus” [ACTS 18:24, 25]. This godly couple did not hesitate to correct an error, even though it might be considered to be a minor point [see ACTS 18:26]. They did not break fellowship, but neither did they remain silent. Perhaps it is our love of ease rather than our love for Christ that allows us to maintain our silence in the face of error. Silence is not always golden. Sometimes it is just yellow.

The Bible pointedly warns Christians against continued fellowship with error. Consider just a few of the pointed warnings presented in the Word of God. To the saints in Rome, Paul appealed, “Watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; *avoid them*” [ROMANS 16:17]. Doctrine is important for fellowship, and errant doctrine leads to errant actions. If people quit the fellowship instead of demonstrating a submissive attitude, it is quite possibly because they have no doctrinal support for their attempt to situate themselves at the centre of their universe instead of submitting to the reign of Christ.

The churches of Galatia were drifting doctrinally when the Apostle cautioned, “Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, *let him be accursed*. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” [GALATIANS 1:8, 9]. Adhering to the Good News concerning Jesus—God in human flesh who presented Himself as a sacrifice for sin—is vital to fellowship.

In his first letter to the Thessalonian Christians the Apostle pointedly demanded, “We command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you *keep away* from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us” [2 THESSALONIANS 3:6]. Soon after, he issued a similar command. “If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed” [2 THESSALONIANS 3: 14]. Submission to Christ and a righteous lifestyle are important—nay, essential—for continued fellowship.

Writing the letter to Titus that is included among the pastoral letters, Paul warned, “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, *have nothing more to do with him*” [TITUS 3:10]. The individual who divides brothers does not have the Spirit of Christ; and nothing divides more permanently than does denial that Jesus is God. Either Jesus is Master of our life, or He is nothing. Either He has provided full salvation, or He has provided nothing. And if we are saved, we are saved to declare His praise, seeking righteousness and making every effort to be true to the message of life we have received. This is the message we have received.

“In [Christ] we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” [EPHESIANS 1:11-14].

The individual who does not have Christ, does not have the Father. John was quite clear in this text, and he was equally clear in his first letter when he wrote, “No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father” [1 JOHN 2:23, 24]. That individual who fails to hold to the teaching about Christ is not born from above, and we can have no everlasting fellowship with such people.

This is in keeping with the strong words of the Apostle in 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-16. “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.’”

I am not suggesting that we who are Christians should be rude—as followers of Christ the Lord we have no warrant to be rude. However, we *are* taught to speak the truth in love, whether or not those hearing the truth are offended by our words. We must distinguish between concern for the feelings of those who are under condemnation and honouring Christ by refusing to accept them as fellow Christians.

There is significant truth in the confession a young preacher made to me some years back. I had asked why he refused to participate in the local ministerial association, and to my query he confessed, “I might get to liking them.” It is wise to be cautious toward those who though claiming to be Christian fail to confess Christ. Accepting as spiritual peers those who deny the Christ only creates confusion among God’s people.

I have not sought to offend anyone, but I will perhaps risk your anger by asking if you are born from above. Have you believed in Christ the Lord? Do you now know Him as Saviour? If you have yet to receive the gift of life that is found only in Him, listen to these words and act on them today.



“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” That promise concludes with the Apostle citing the Prophet Joel, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**]. Believe on Christ the Lord and be saved now. Amen.