

2 John 1:7-11

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There are liars in the church who teach that Jesus was not both man and God, but merely had the appearance of being a man. John warns his readers to guard themselves against this false teaching, for if they fail to abide in Jesus' teaching, they will miss out on the future rewards that can only be earned through faithful obedience. He adds that the believers should turn false teachers away from their church and not pretend to be friendly with them, otherwise they're condoning their deception.

John's reminder to the church is timely, because *many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh*. Perhaps here we find the "red flag" to look for, to know who not to listen to. It is anyone who says that Jesus was not really flesh and bones. There was a substantial following of the notion that Jesus had the appearance of flesh, but was not truly flesh. This was a form of what was called Gnosticism. This heresy, along with Arianism (which said Jesus was not fully God) were both eventually dealt with at the Council of Nicaea, over two hundred years later (325 AD).

It is implied that in some way believing Jesus has not come in the flesh absolves people from the command to love one another. Although John does not express such a link, the proximity of the statements seems to indicate there is one. This makes sense, because the root of any heresy is to justify some sort of sin, which often includes exploitation of others. Jesus reamed the Pharisees for this very thing. In His long list of condemnation against them, Jesus included "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses" (Matthew 23:14). They were exploiting the poor while maintaining a façade of religious superiority that Jesus described as being like a whitewashed tomb.

John states that anyone who teaches that Jesus has not come in the flesh *is the deceiver and the antichrist*. The terms *deceiver* and *antichrist* are connected. It makes sense that anyone who is deceiving people to lead them away from the commands of Christ are those who oppose Christ. The word translated *antichrist* is "antichristos." It is only found in the New Testament in the writings of John, but is not found in his Revelation. The man who will appear at the end of the age and embody the characteristics of Satan, being both an angel of light (promising prosperity) as well as an instrument of death, is often referred to as "the antichrist." However, in John's Revelation, he is called the "Beast." John confirms that this Beast is the ultimate antichrist in his first epistle:

"...and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world"
(1 John 4:3)

The one that they “have heard that it is coming” is the Beast, the ultimate antichrist. But the spirit of the Beast is “already in the world.” Any deceiver is operating in the spirit of antichrist, who will be the ultimate human deceiver. In the case of 2 John, there were those who were deceiving, and leading people away from the truth. Any such action is against the way of Christ, so follows the spirit of antichrist.

What is the ramification of falling into the deception of walking outside the true commands of Jesus, in particular the command to love one another? It is to *lose what has been accomplished*, and not receive a *full reward*. This indicates that we can store up treasure in heaven, then lose it through unfaithfulness. This is why the scripture emphasizes enduring in faithfulness all the way until our life is completed. Paul made this clear in his last epistle (2 Timothy 2:12).

John exhorts the church to *Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward*. By saying *watch yourselves*, John makes clear that those who have believed in Jesus and are a part of the church, the Body of Christ, have true agency to make choices. Each person chooses what or whom to believe. God does not impose that. Each person has the responsibility to decide what to believe, and whether to believe what is true or what is false.

In this instance, John knows the people receiving this letter understand what is true, as he made clear earlier. So this is not a matter of ignorance versus knowledge. It is a matter of deciding what is in their best interest, and how to “walk.” It is deciding: “Is it best for me to love others, or to follow this other way?” This is the same proposition as deciding, “Do I believe that Jesus’s command is in my true self-interest, or am I going to choose another way?” Usually deception involves urging people that their true best interest is served in following some way apart from God. This was the case with Eve (Genesis 3:6). It is the case with us. In his first epistle, John exhorts believers:

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”
(1 John 2:15-16)

The word translated “love” in this verse from 1 John 2 is “agape,” which is the love of choice, based on values. In this case, to love the world is to choose the value that “life is all about me fulfilling my appetites.” John says we can’t fill ourselves with the promises of the world and still be filled with the truth from the Father. In the same way, we can’t choose to believe what the world says is in our best interest, and gain the rewards from the world, and still get rewards in heaven. They are mutually exclusive.

Jesus made this point many times. He stated:

- “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:1).
- “So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to

you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:2-4).

- “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:5-6).
- “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:16-18).
- “Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full” (Luke 6:22-24).
- “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High” (Luke 6:35).

John does not want these people whom he loves to be led astray, and seek the rewards of the world. He wants them to have *a full reward* from Jesus at the judgement seat of Christ. It is worth noting that this *reward* is based on *what we have accomplished*. Becoming a child of God has nothing to do with accomplishment. Being born again into God’s family is received as a free gift through the simple act of believing. As John recorded in his gospel, all that is required to be born again is to have enough faith to look upon Jesus on the cross, hoping to be delivered from the deadly venom of sin (John 3:14-16).

But in order to have our works approved by God at the judgement seat of Christ, we will have to walk in faithfulness. Paul used the example of an Olympic athlete to describe this. An Olympic athlete buffets his body in order to win the great prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). In a similar way, Paul says he exercises spiritual discipline to win the great prize of Christ’s approval. Unlike the Olympic wreath, the prize of Christ never fades away.

John does not specify exactly what the believers had *accomplished* that would have already earned them treasure in heaven. But it could be faithfulness of any sort. As Paul states in his letter to the Colossians:

“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” (Colossians 3:23-24)

This verse from Colossians makes clear that anything we do can be an accomplishment that gets a reward from Christ, if we do that thing “for the Lord rather than for men.” Jesus made this

point by noting that even a cup of cold water would get a great reward if it was given in His name (Matthew 10:42).

Now John addresses those who fall into deception. He has already said they would not get a “full reward.” Now he states that *Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God*. The phrase “goes too far” is a translation of a single Greek word “proago.” It means to go ahead, or go in front. The Bethlehem star is said to “proago” the wise men. The idea seems to be that if anyone walks in this life on their own, without abiding in Christ, then they are walking in the ways of the world.

As in 1 John 2, people who love the world will have intimate fellowship with the world, and the (fleeting and empty) rewards of the world. This means they will not have intimate fellowship with God, and will lose the (enduring and fulfilling) rewards of God. We can't have intimate fellowship with both at once. We either walk in fellowship with one or the other.

This shift in fellowship can change moment to moment, based on the perspective we choose, who or what we believe to be in our best interest, and what we decide to do, how we “walk.” We see this in the case of the Apostle Peter. One moment he was acting as a blessed instrument of God, expressing the truth of Jesus's identity as the anointed Messiah sent from God (Matthew 16:16-17), but shortly after Jesus rebuked Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's” (Matthew 16:23).

If John's disciples are walking in their own strength, then they *do not have God* walking with them. That does not mean they are no longer children of God. It does mean that they are walking apart from God and His ways. Paul makes clear that believers can sow to the flesh, and if they do, they will reap (the reward of) corruption (Galatians 5:16; 6:7). John is saying the same thing here using relational terms. The word translated *have* in the phrase *does not have God* can mean to keep, hold fast, wear, or to be closely joined to something.

We cannot walk closely with, and be joined to the world and also walk closely with and be joined to God. Believers are always children of God. That is a gift that cannot be earned or lost. But believers must choose daily whether to walk in the ways of the world, and receive its rewards, or walk in the truth, loving one another, and receive the rewards of Christ.

When John uses the word *abide* in the phrase *does not abide in the teaching of Christ*, it seems likely he is thinking of his famous gospel chapter that focuses on abiding, John 15. In John chapter 15, John records the teaching Jesus gave them on abiding in Him just like a branch abides in the vine. Jesus made clear that if a branch, representing a believer, is not being fruitful, that God will lift him up, as onto a trellis, so the branch can produce fruit. And then as the branch produces fruit, God will prune that branch, so it can produce even more fruit. The pruning may hurt, but it is in the branch's best interest. More fruit is more accomplishment. More accomplishment is more reward.

However, if after all this care and tending a branch decides not to abide in the vine, it will lose its source of nourishment. It will just wither and become a fruitless twig that is only fit to be used as kindling to start a fire. It's usefulness is very slight. The vine being burned in the fire might

picture the unprofitable works of a believer being burned in judgement fire, on the day of Christ's judgement for all believers (2 Corinthians 5:10). As Paul says, their works will burn, but they will be saved, though as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:15).

If someone *does not abide in the teaching of Christ*, then they are not joined to God. They are like a branch that is detached from the vine. That is a branch that will wither, and become small-usefulness kindling. On the other hand, *the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son*. The one who *abides in the teaching* of Christ is like a branch that abides in the vine. It is nourished, and can produce much fruit. It will have great accomplishment, and with great accomplishment comes great reward. As Jesus made clear in John 15, none of us can accomplish anything of lasting value apart from abiding in Christ. And John points out here that the way to abide in Christ is to *abide in the teaching of Christ*.

Now John gives some practical advice on how to avoid the negative effect of false teachers. He advises *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting*. When John says *do not receive* the false teacher *into your house*, it seems likely John has in mind the gathering of believers in a church setting. It was common for churches to meet in houses (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2). The word translated *greeting* is most often translated "rejoice." The idea seems to be, "Don't let them in, and be direct about it. You aren't doing them or you any favors to act happy about something that is harming people."

You don't want to be "happy" with this person, and act like "everything is ok" *for the one who gives him a greeting* (rejoice) *participates in his evil deeds*. There is nothing happy about deception. This is serious. Deceivers should not be accommodated. They should be given no place, no station from which they can lead people astray. To accommodate a deceiver, by "being nice to them" is to be one who *participates in his evil deeds*. That certainly fits a description of something that would erode what has been accomplished for the kingdom, with a loss of kingdom rewards.

Biblical Text

⁷ For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. ⁹ Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; ¹¹ for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.