



How to Treat False Teachers

Biblical Consistency and the Believer's Treatment of False Teachers



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If Christians are to be kind and loving to everyone (Luke 10:29-37), some question why 2 John 10-11 teaches, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine (‘the doctrine of Christ’—vs. 9), **do not receive him into your house nor greet him**; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”¹ Also, why did Paul instruct Timothy to “shun profane and idle babblings” (2 Timothy 2:16; 1 Timothy 6:20-21)? Are Christians to shun those with whom we disagree, and even go so far as not to greet them or allow them into our homes?

First, Scripture, indeed, repeatedly calls for Christians to love everyone—whether family, friends, fellow Christians, or enemies (Matthew 5:43-48; 22:36-40; Romans 12:9-21). We are to “[r]epay **no one** evil for evil” (Romans 12:17), but strive to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave” us (Ephesians 4:32). But Christian kindness and love are not antithetical to such things as, for example, punishing rule breakers. A father who loves his son, and would even die for him, will promptly discipline him for unruly conduct (Proverbs 13:24; Ephesians 6:4). A school principal may genuinely love and care for every student under his oversight, but he

may occasionally have to expel a disorderly child from the school for at least two reasons: (1) so that the hundreds of other students who want to get an education can safely and successfully do so, and (2) in hopes that such drastic measures will cause the unruly child to awaken to his senses before it is too late (and he does something far worse as a teenager or as an adult). An **uninformed outsider**, who sees a father disciplining his son or a school principal punishing a student, may initially think less of these adults and wonder how they could call themselves Christians. The **logical, more informed bystander**, however, will quickly size up the situation and easily see the consistency in loving, disciplinary actions.

In the epistle of 2 John, the apostle expressed his concern for the eternal destiny of Christians, saying, “Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward” (vs. 8, NASB). John was alarmed because deceptive false teachers who denied the incarnation of Jesus were a serious threat to the salvation of Christians. “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh” (2 John 7). These false teachers (known as Gnostics) alleged that Christ could not have been incarnated because the flesh is inherently sinful. And, since the flesh is supposedly intrinsically evil, Gnostics taught that Christians did not need to resist fleshly temptations. Just “do whatever feels good” and know that such wicked actions are only physical and not spiritual. Allegedly, the soul could still be pure, even if the individuals themselves participated in wicked activity.²

The apostle John (who had “seen” and “handled” the actual body of Christ—1 John 1:1-4; i.e., Jesus **did** come in the flesh) repeatedly condemned the central teachings of certain Gnostics who were confusing and misleading first-century Christians.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because **many false prophets have gone out into the world**. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world (1 John 4:1-3).

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil... Whoever has been born of God does not sin (1 John 3:4-9).

False doctrine was a real and present danger in the first-century church, just as it is today. Christians were (and are) to be on “guard” because “some have strayed concerning the faith”—profane and idle babblers and teachers of contradictory doctrines of “what is falsely called knowledge” (Greek *gnosis*; 1 Timothy 6:20-21; cf. 2 Timothy 2:15-26). Denying the physical life, death, burial, and resurrection

of the body of Christ was heresy, and thus John and others warned the early church of such deception. What's more, claiming that "all unrighteousness is **not** sin," was to directly contradict the Law of Christ. In truth, "the works of the flesh are evident," and "those who practice such things will **not** inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19,21). John wrote: "Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God," because "all unrighteousness **is** sin" (1 John 3:10; 5:17).

Christians are commanded to withdraw fellowship (lovingly, faithfully, and sorrowfully) from brethren who rebel against the teachings of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Such actions by Christians and churches are taken for at least two reasons: (1) to keep the church and the Christian families that comprise her from being harmed spiritually by the defiantly unfaithful (whose very tolerated presence would have even more damaging effects than an incessantly disruptive student in a school room; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:6-7); and (2) in hopes of causing the wayward child of God to come to his senses (being "ashamed" of his sinful conduct; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 1 Corinthians 5:5)—repenting of sin and being restored to the family of God.

Similarly, in 2 John 10-11, the apostle of the Lord instructed hospitable Christians to recognize the seriousness of greeting and housing deceptive false teachers. [NOTE: "The greeting was '*Chairo!*' literally, *goodspeed* or *God speed*. This greeting was more than mere formality; it was an approval of the course being pursued by the one thus greeting, and included a desire for success in the effort attempted."³] First-century roaming teachers and preachers "**depended** on the generosity of the members of the church" for their housing and hospitality.⁴ John the apostle, however, wanted the church to understand the serious threat that these dangerous false teachers posed to the precious bride of Christ. Doctrinal error is not something to "play with," especially when such error involves the foundation of the Church (the life of Christ—2 John 7) and the denial of sin (the very thing that results in eternal death for the impenitent—Romans 6:23; Luke 13:3,5). By refusing to house and bid God-speed to deceptive teachers, the ungodly efforts of these misleading "messengers" would be greatly diminished. In time, they might choose to (or have to) stop their sowing of error altogether because of lack of opportunities, assistance, and encouragement. Such a result combined with genuine repentance would be the very thing for which Christians hope and pray.

Anyone who can see the reasonable and loving consistency of parents telling their children to "be nice to everyone," **but** "don't listen to these dangerous people" (showing them pictures of known child molesters), should be able to see the consistency of God's message concerning Christian love and hospitality, and the way Christians react to false teachers who espouse damnable error. Children who shun dangerous sexual predators are protecting their own innocence, as well as keeping themselves and their families from a moment (or a lifetime) of grief. What's more, the avoided, dangerous strangers are not given the opportunity to continue in their sins. Thus, the children's obedient avoidance of them could be of great help to the sinful strangers in the highest way possible—if they awaken to their spiritual senses.

Christians are actually fulfilling the Law of Christ to "do good to all" (Galatians 6:2,10) even as we identify and refuse to embrace and fellowship false teachers. We are "doing good" to the "household

of faith” by helping keep her pure and unaffected by cancer-spreading deceptive teachers (2 Timothy 2:17-18). Allowing error to spread would be tantamount to “rejoic[ing] in iniquity,” which is unloving (1 Corinthians 13:6). What’s more, the false teachers themselves are in no way encouraged to continue down the road of deceit. Rather, it is the hope and prayer of Christians that false teachers would become convicted of the error of their ways and repent before the Master Teacher (Luke 2:47; John 7:46) returns and judges them eternally for their doctrinal deceit (2 Peter 2).

[NOTE: Near the conclusion of his excellent commentary on 2 John, Guy N. Woods made an appropriate observation that both Christians and critics of 2 John 10-11 should consider: “John does not here forbid hospitality to strangers, or, for that matter, to false teachers when, in so doing, false teaching is neither encouraged nor done. Were we to find a teacher known to be an advocate of false doctrine suffering, it would be our duty to minister to his need, provided that in so doing we did not abet or encourage him in the propagation of false doctrine.... **What is forbidden** is the reception of such teachers in such fashion as to supply them with an opportunity to teach their tenets, to maintain an association with them when such would involve us in the danger of accepting their doctrines.... The test is, Does one become a partaker by the action contemplated? If yes, our duty is clear; we must neither receive them nor give them greeting; if No, the principle here taught is not applicable.”⁵]

Endnotes

¹ Cf. Steve Wells (2015), “Should Believers Discuss Their Faith with Nonbelievers?”

<http://www.skepticsannotatedbible.com/contra/discuss.html>.

² For more information, see “Gnosticism” (1982), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 2:484-490.

³ Guy N. Woods (1979), *New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate), p. 349, italics in orig.

⁴ I. Howard Marshall (1978), *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p. 74, emp. added.

⁵ Woods, pp. 349-350, emp. added.

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