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The Devil's Great Commission

Postcards from John, Part 5

2 John 7 & 9

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

There is only one real and authentic Jesus. In the world's sea of faux-Jesus', the Apostle John reminds and encourages his reader on how to recognize false teachers. These false teachers disguise their Jesus in ways to deceive and persuade. They cloak their Jesus in familiar terms and comfortable possibilities, lying and misleading as many as will follow.

Discussion Points:

Our world and Western culture, in particular, inundates us with multiple Jesus' to follow. The choices allow for a person to choose any type of Jesus that would fit his desired philosophy.

- Where or in what situations can believers be tempted to follow a false Jesus?
- How does society deceitfully sell a false Jesus?
- What can the church do to equip believers for recognizing a false Jesus? What can parents do to equip their children?

The Bible teaches that Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) and prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus even warns that "false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24).

- What are the strategies that Satan uses to deceive?
- How can we guard ourselves against spiritual deception?
- How does the Word of God play a role in defeating deception?

Jesus cautions in Matthew 10:33 that "whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."

- How do other religions redefine Jesus' nature, person, deity, or purpose in ways that deny the authentic Christ?
- What are some ways you are able to detect a false Jesus?
- In what ways are these spiritual deceivers and deniers antichrists?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Gospel Connection:

Jesus descended from heaven to become a man, lived a sinless life, died a sinner's death, rose from the dead after three days, ascended into heaven and is now our high priest today. There is only one true Jesus.

Practical implications:

Think: How am I guarding against spiritual deception? Am I spending adequate time learning the truth of Jesus in God's Word?

Pray: Praise God for sending His one and only Son to be our means of salvation. Ask that He help you grow in knowledge of and relationship with Jesus.

Do: Study God's word in order to know the authentic Jesus.

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2 John 7 & 9

Today, more than ever, when someone tells you they believe in Jesus, you need to find out which Jesus they say they believe in.

One pastor and author, recently, and rather tongue in cheek, one author recently catalogued a number of popular versions about Jesus in making the point that not every Jesus is the real Jesus.

For instance:

There's Open-Minded Jesus - He just wants everybody to coexist since everyone's right anyway, and he loves everyone all the time no matter what they believe or do, except for people who are not open-minded like you;

There's Republican Jesus – who is against tax increases and big government, but He's for family values and owning firearms;

Then there's Democrat Jesus – who wants to reduce our carbon footprint, increase immigration, raise taxes and print more money;

But then there's Starbuck's Jesus - He just loves spiritual conversations; He drinks fair trade coffee, goes to film festivals and drives a Hybrid;

There's Touchdown Jesus – He helps athletes run faster and jump higher and score more points than non-Christians;

There's Martyr Jesus – He was a good man who died a cruel death, and we need to feel sorry for Him;

There's Gentle Jesus – with high cheek bones, flowing hair, He walks around barefoot and looks very European.

There's Hippie Jesus – who teaches everyone to give peace a chance, imagine a world without religion, and He just wants to remind us all, that all you need is love;

There's Career Jesus – who gives us that great job when we think positive thoughts and reach for our potential and stretch for the stars so we can buy more stuff;

There's Spirituality Jesus – who avoids churches, pastors, doctrine and would rather have people out in nature, finding the god-within while listening to weird music;

There's Guru Jesus – He's an inspirational teacher who actually believes in you . . . He helps you find your center . . . which is, again, all about finding you.

There's Boyfriend Jesus – who wraps His arms around you as you sing breathlessly about His intoxicating love in your desperate place;

Finally, there's Good Jesus – He came to simply show you how to help people, live the golden rule, save the planet and become a better you.¹

In a Peanuts cartoon, summer is over and the students are back for their first day of school. The teacher asks them to write a paragraph on returning to class. Lucy writes, "There is nothing more satisfying or challenging than education, and I look forward to a year of expanding knowledge; vacations are nice, but it's good to get back to school." The teacher collects the papers and calls Lucy to the front of the class where she applauds her for writing the best paper. In the final frame of the cartoon, Lucy leans over and whispers to Charlie Brown, "After a while, you learn what sells."

The danger of selling a false Jesus isn't new . . . the deception and distortion and danger of false teaching goes all the way back to the days the Apostles.

He warned the Corinthian church about *deceitful workers, disguising themselves as messengers of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:13)* . . . in other words, "I'm here because Jesus sent me!"

The question is, "Which Jesus?" And with that question, we arrive at the heart of John the Apostle's warning.

Turn back to your copy of John's postcard – called *Second John* – found just a page or two from the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, also written by the Apostle John.

John is not only about to remind a woman of the real Jesus, he's about to equip her to spot a false teacher. John is attempting to protect her and her children, along with the church at large as he describes false teachers – and to this day, this postcard from John remains a fantastic education for us all – this is how you spot a false teacher.

Notice verse 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.*

Skip down to verse 9 – we'll unpack these two verses together - *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.*

Let me give you six words that effectively show up in John's description of false teachers:

1. First of all, **they are deceptive.**

Go back to verse 7. *For many deceivers* have gone out into the world . . . the fact that John makes a reference here to ***many deceivers*** indicates that this isn't a minor problem, this is a widespread movement – and a real danger.ⁱⁱ

The word John uses here for ***deceivers*** is *planos* which means wanderer. *Planos* is from the same word family as *planetes*, which gave us our English word *planet*.ⁱⁱⁱ

The ancient world thought that planets and stars were wandering in space – so like some wandering planet, these false teachers were leading people into sort of roving, unsettled wanderings.^{iv}

Jude describes these false teachers as ***wandering stars for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever*** (Jude 13).

They essentially want to pull you into their orbit, as they wander away from Son and into spiritual darkness.

But they're deceptive – and they're probably self-deceived as well. They don't carry signs around with them that read – “Let me lead you into spiritual darkness” – “Follow me and we'll wander around without meaning.” They don't look sinister or evil, but caring and intelligent.

But they are only pretending – that's what a deceiver does – they pretend to represent a Savior to whom they don't belong and actually don't want.

I couldn't help but tuck this news illustration away because it would serve as a great illustration of deceiving everybody – at least for a while.

A college sophomore noticed that the coaching staff of his University of Virginia basketball team all wore the same suit with the same orange necktie. So, before Virginia's conference championship game against Duke, in 2014, where Virginia would win the conference championship, he and his friends decided that he would try to pretend to be one of the coaches. It seemed farfetched, but he found what he needed at Walmart – a suit jacket, suit pants, dress shoes, dress socks, a white dress shirt and an orange tie.

The next morning, he bought tickets just to get in the door and headed to the game. During a TV timeout, he made his move, confidently marching past an usher, past the cheerleaders and onto the court and joined the Virginia team huddled on the court with the other coaching staff.

He sat on the sidelines with the team throughout the game – and no one noticed. When the buzzer sounded and Virginia won the championship, he celebrated out on the court as confetti fell around him. He stood in the handshake lineup and even got to shake Coach K's hand. Photographs from the end of the game show him wearing a championship t-shirt over his suit along with the other coaches and players.

Only then did a member of the coaching staff take a closer look and catch him . . . but at that point, it didn't really matter – he had been a

member of the coaching staff of the victorious team for at least one game.^v

That's exactly what a false teacher does . . . he pretends to be a member of the victorious team . . . he dresses the part . . . he plays the role . . . he smiles for the camera . . . he plays along . . . deceivers are great pretenders.

Secondly – they are not only deceivers;

2. **They are disciple makers.**

Notice again as John describes them in *verse 7* - For many deceivers ***have gone out into the world. They have gone out*** – embedded in that verb is the word that gives us our word for exit. They have exited – the implication is that they exited the church.

Perhaps they are the ones John wrote of earlier when he said that certain individuals had left the church – in fact, he uses the same verb (exelthon) ***they exited from us – they went out from us but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us.*** (1 John 2:19).

He's not talking about a believer who backslides and needs restoration – he's talking about somebody abandoning the gospel and attempting to talk everybody they can into walking away from Jesus as well.

In fact, John's expression here of them ***going into the world*** implies that they view themselves on a mission.^{vi}

This is the same language of the Lord's great commission. ***Go into all the world and make disciples (Mark 16:15) . . . go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).***

Which means that these false teachers are equally passionate about their global disciple-making mission!

How fast was this? It didn't take the devil long at all to prepare his ambassadors of error to try and deceive the world and distract and disunify the Body of Christ!

They're already at it!

Mark Twain – not necessarily a good theologian – but he once made the correct observation that a lie can travel half-way around the world while truth is still putting on his shoes.

But just imagine the implications of this global mission – the Devil actually has his own twisted version of the great commission.

The commission of Jesus to His disciples was to go out into the world and tell the truth; the commission of the Devil to his disciples is to go out into the world and tell lies.

As passionately and strategically as you can desire to make disciples for the kingdom of Light, false teachers are just as strategic about making disciples for the Kingdom of Darkness.

They are deceivers;

They are disciple makers;

3. **Third, they are deniers.**

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, ***those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh . . .***

With that, John arrives at the core of their error. And this, beloved, is the main issue to keep in mind.

You don't need to be an expert in all the false religions of the world, although learning more of what they believe will help you expose them to biblical truths they deny.

But what you do need to remember is that false teachers and false teaching is fundamentally attempting to sell another Jesus, not the Jesus defined & described in the Bible, which is why they've usually got something additional for you to read. "The Bible's nice . . . but here, read this."

They aren't going to verbally come out and tell you to throw your Bible away.

I had a couple of people on my doorstep the other day and their opening line was, "We'd like to interest you in reading the Bible." I said, "You know, I've always wanted to be that interested."

What they really want to do is redefine the nature and person and deity and purpose of Jesus Christ. So learn to ask the question – "Do you believe in the coming of God the Son who became the literal God-in-the-flesh-man.

Then hold your breath:

- Baha'i views God as unknowable and unable to incarnate Himself.

- Christian Science believes Jesus is a highly enlightened man.
- Jehovah's Witnesses believe Jesus is a created angel.
- Freemasonry views Jesus as a supremely good man.
- Mormonism view Jesus as an exalted man by virtue of his obedience.
- Scientology says Jesus was invented by the church.
- The Unification Church sees Jesus as a special creation of God and not God in the flesh.
- The Unitarian Universalist sees Jesus as merely a good man.
- The Unity School of Christianity sees Jesus as the inner self of everyone.
- Zen Buddhism views Jesus as a good man, but not a Savior because, well, man doesn't need saving.

And on and on and on.

This is the unifying theme of false teaching . . . at some point they are going to fudge on the person – the deity – the purpose – the nature – the eternality – the sinlessness – the atoning sacrifice – the sovereignty of the biblical Jesus.

John points out here that they – notice – ***do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.***

This expression is a figure of speech in which the word ***flesh*** is used to represent everything Jesus did. In other words, this is a reference to His virgin birth, His sinless life, His atoning death, his literal resurrection – and more.^{vii}

They do not acknowledge – (homologeo) they won't *confess* – they won't openly agree, and, frankly, they don't want to be put in a corner where they're pressed about it.

And would you notice that he doesn't say they openly deny Jesus came in the flesh . . . notice, he says that they just ***don't acknowledge it.***

In other words, false teachers can be detected not just by what they say, but what they won't say.

How many false teachers have you seen on television or in print where they won't quite say that sin is sinful; that Jesus is the only way to Heaven; that Hell is real and salvation is evidenced by faith in Christ alone.

They don't want to talk about guilty sinners needing a Savior who fully and finally atones for guilt. In fact, implied in this statement of denial is the denial of the *coming again* of Jesus; in other words, they really don't want to talk about Him coming back either. We really want Him to stay wherever He is . . . this is a different Jesus!

The bottom line, as Sam Gordon wrote it so well – is this:

The Christ they offer to their converts is not the Christ of history; He is not the Christ of scripture; He is not the Christ of the gospel.^{viii}

So here's the profile of a false teacher who sells a false Jesus:

- They are deceivers
- They are disciple makers
- They are deniers

4. **Fourth, false teachers are demonic**

John writes,

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.***

John adds these titles that you immediately associate with the demonic agenda of Satan who ultimately counterfeits Jesus during the Tribulation period with his antichrist.

The prefix ***anti***, in the Greek language, means against. We've adopted this in our English language and we talk about being antigovernment; antiemotional; antipatriotic^{ix} . . . or antipatriots; whatever comes to mind.

John isn't telling us that each of these false teachers is the antichrist of Revelation; he's telling us that these false teachers mirror the character and the mission and the message of the final antichrist – they are against Jesus.^x

They are the forerunners of the final Antichrist.^{xi}

They deal in gospel distortion and doctrinal deception.

These false teachers are literally ambassadors of the Devil – and in Matthew 7 when they stand before the Lord and say, wait a minute, we did our teaching and our ministry and our miracles in the name of Jesus – we didn't do it in the name of the Devil . . . we weren't ambassadors of Satan – and Jesus is going to pull away their masks of hypocrisy and reveal that they were, in reality, demonically inspired, demonically empowered, demonically driven – they never really did anything for Jesus, it was all about themselves – they just used the name of Jesus to scam the church and deceive their following.

Jesus said to the false teachers and religious leaders of his day, recorded in *Matthew 23 – Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees . . . you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte (disciple); and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*

Imagine – they are traveling on land and on sea to make just one convert – they are passionately devoted to the Devil's Great Commission . . . and they are actually making their converts doubly accountable; doubly ensnared, doubly damned to Hell!

5. False teachers are disoriented

Look down at *verse 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.

They're not abiding – they haven't pitched their tent and driven down stakes in the teaching of Christ.

This can either refer to teaching about Christ in the scriptures, or teaching from Christ recorded in the scriptures. Either way, the false teacher has no interest in either one.

They don't want to abide by this Book – they don't want to be confined to God's word.^{xii}

Which is why they're really not interested in teaching God's word; they talk about it . . . they talk around it . . . they refer to it . . . quote a verse or two from it . . . hold it up .

. . . but the last thing they'd ever want to do is actually teach through it.

They'd rather pursue visions, additional information, clever principles, new revelation, fascinating dreams . . . that stuff's a lot more interesting.

In fact, this is exactly what John writes about here.

The word he uses for *anyone who goes too far* is a word that refers to someone advancing in their thinking.

John was battling the Gnostic heretics during his day who believed that they had advanced to a higher understanding of God . . . they had come up with secret ways to be saved; they had a new enlightened understanding of Jesus.^{xiii}

Listen, there's nothing wrong with advancing in your thinking. There's nothing wrong with advancing in your spiritual life and developing and maturing. But John ties the idea of advancing in your understanding with being anchored to Christ.

Notice again – *anyone going too far and (what?) not abiding in the teaching of Christ* – in other words, they are going too far and, in the process, leaving God's word behind.

Listen, you are not advancing spiritually if you're leaving the Bible behind . . . you never graduate from the Bible.

Oh, that was good for me back then, but I've progressed . . .

Anyone who progresses into false teaching about Jesus Christ does nothing more than take a fatal plunge into spiritual disorientation and ultimately eternal darkness.^{xiv}

Oh, yes – you *grow – you advance – but you grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (2 Peter 3:18).

Be warned . . . false teachers are: Deceivers, Disciple makers, Deniers, Demonic, Disoriented, and

Finally,

6. They are doomed

Notice *verse 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.

In other words,

-you deny Jesus and you forfeit the Father.

-you turn your back on Jesus and you lose sight of God.

-you deny Jesus and you miss the way to Heaven.

I love John's shift in terminology here to ***the Father***. You can't have the Father without the Son . . . but if you have received the Son . . . you get His Father; you are welcomed into a family,

with a Father who will one day move you into His home – the Father's House.

You lose the Son and you lose everything one day . . . you receive the Son and you gain everything . . . one day . . . and forever . . . forever.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 02/17/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Kevin DeYoung, "Who Do You Say That I Am?" from his Restless, and Reformed blog (6-10-09)

ii D. Edmond Hiebert, The Epistles of John (BJU Press, 1991), p. 301

iii Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, editors, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged (Eerdmans, 1985), p. 857

iv Adapted from Kenneth Wuest, In These Last Days (Eerdmans, 1954), p. 205

v Adapted from Joshua Gardner, "Hidden in Plain Sight", Daily Mail (3-20-14)

vi Hiebert, p. 302

vii Gary W. Derickson, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John (Lexham Press, 2014), p. 619

viii Adapted from Sam Gordon, Living In The Light (Ambassador, 2001), p. 244

ix Adapted from William L. Hendricks, The Letters of John (Convention Press, 1976), p. 133

x Adapted from David L. Allen, 1-3 John (Crossway, 2013), p. 262

xi Hiebert, p. 303

xii John MacArthur, 1-3 John (Moody Publishers, 2007), p. 235

xiii Adapted from Hiebert, p. 306

xiv Adapted from Hiebert, p. 306