

How to Handle a Heretic

Postcards from John, Part 7

2 John 8 & 10-11

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

No matter what attractive euphemism people assign to various heresies, they remain heresies. Dressing up a falsehood into prettier packaging only means the false teaching and the false teachers have a prettier covering. The Apostle John warns that it is our responsibility to identify those who make a fundamental error and try to redefine Jesus. Do not close your ears and eyes to such danger. Do not open your home to such peril. Do not open your wallet to propagate such hazard. But do open your Bible, study the truths, and learn to interpret it correctly so that you will not be led astray.

Discussion Points:

The world parades around heresy as though it was good and the correct path to walk down.

- How does the culture succeed in deceiving with clever heresies those who have heard the Truth?
- In what ways is the church infiltrated by these same heresies?
- Why is it important for the church and believers individually to stay alert and watch for deceivers who distract you from running the race?

The Apostle John warns believers to avoid receiving these false teachers into their homes.

- Why would this warning be of grave importance to the early church, as well as to the church today?
- How can we guard ourselves against false teachers and false teachings being welcomed into our homes?
- How does the Word of God play a role in defeating heresy, even heresy that has a hint of truth to it?

Discussion Guide Cont.

John exhorts his readers to be diligent in identifying these false teachers and not allowing them any comfortable fellowship or financial support with those who seek to follow the truth. He even goes on to warn the believers that they will become partakers in their evil deeds if they do.

- In what ways do believers encourage the spreading of false teaching by continuing comfortable relationships and giving financially to false teachers?
- Does this command mean that you never have any relationships outside of someone who is a true believe? Why or why not?
- How would this concept relate to a Christian's good stewardship with his money?

Gospel Connection:

The Bible is God's words relating to us His eternal plan of redemption to the fallen world. That plan is through Jesus Christ's birth, death, and resurrection as the only means for a believer's salvation. Many attempt to redefine God, Jesus Christ, the salvation message, and eternity, but there are not many roads which lead to heaven. There is one.

Practical implications:

Think: Am I spending adequate time in the Bible in order to discern heresies which may infiltrate my life and church? Am I currently being too friendly with or supporting those I believe are teaching untruths?

Pray: Praise God for giving us His word that you may be able to discern truth from heresy. Ask that He open your eyes to heresy or false teachers that may be in your life already.

Do: Stay alert for heresy and continue to study and learn God's word.

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In 1977, a fish merchant traveling through South America discovered a fish he'd never tasted before . . . it was called a tooth fish and it was enjoyed by the locals – he liked it too, but he knew it would never sell back in the States under the name, Tooth fish. So he renamed it, “Chilean Sea Bass” and today, it so popular that it is nearing extinction.

In the 1960's, an American produce importer changed the name of Chinese Gooseberries to Kiwi Fruit . . . and popularity immediately increased.

After Canadians developed a cooking oil from a plant called Rapeseed, it wasn't long before they realized the name of the product needed changing. So, 20 years ago, the FDA approved their name change from Rapeseed Oil to Canola oil, and sales immediately went through the roof.

When the California prune board realized the words “prune” and “laxative” were forever linked in the American mind, in the year 2000, they switched to calling them, dried plums. And sales have never been the same. In fact, I read, that in documented focus groups, people insist that they prefer the taste of dried plums to prunes – even though they're the same thing.

You have to learn what sells and how to say it best.

Let's call false religious systems ‘other faiths’; let's change heresy to ‘belief system’; let's redefine morality and call it ‘personal taste’; let's start referring to doctrine as ‘narrow mindedness’, and while we're at it, let's call sin an ‘alternative lifestyle’. . . in fact, let's hope nobody asks questions when our world started calling abortion ‘freedom of choice’.

I read recently that on the campus of a university, a sign hung on a wall for some time

that advertised the dogma of our day. It read: It is OK for you to think you are right – it is not OK for you to think someone else is wrong.”

It is ok for you to think you're right . . . but it's not ok for you to dare suggest that someone else might be wrong.

The great sin of our generation is the sin of thinking someone else might be sinning.ⁱ

And, of course, that ultimately redefines the authority of God. I mean, even God is narrow minded enough to tell somebody that they're a sinner – He's not a God worth following.

The problem is, this kind of perspective doesn't stop with university signs or restaurant menus that sell Chilean bass.

This has now joined the church and, in many cases, it speaks from behind pulpits, which is why just a few months ago a pastor prayed a prayer of dedication at the opening of a new abortion clinic, calling it a ‘holy ground’ event. The article read how the dedication ceremony was “[a] celebration of conscience and moral decision making, this event will include interfaith blessings, prayer, and testimonies about receiving and providing abortion care.”ⁱⁱ

How do you change the word abortion into an act of receiving or providing care? It's a place where pain and guilt and sorrow begin – we now have documented evidence that 3 out of 4 women openly struggle over their decision; in fact, I read recently that 3 out of 4 women went through with it out of intense pressure from other people – husbands, boyfriends and parents.

So maybe it'll help us feel better if we change the words – in fact, this article went on to talk about Planned Parenthood's current

attempts to rebrand itself using words like ‘holy’ and ‘blessed’ and even ‘sacred’.

Sounds like somebody’s eating a bowl of dried prunes and calling it plums.

Beloved, it’s one thing for the world – and the religious world – to get it tragically wrong when it comes to moral and ethical issues which can impact a lifetime...

But it’s another thing to get it wrong when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which offers forgiveness for all of us, no matter what we’ve done; it’s another thing to preach a different gospel which can determine, not only the trajectory of someone’s lifetime, but someone’s eternal destiny in Heaven or Hell.

I mean, it’s one thing to change the names of fish and fruit so people will eat it . . . it’s another thing to sell lies and deception about God and His word and hope that people will swallow it whole.

Would it surprise you to learn that God has assigned every Christian – not just pastors/elders and deacons – but every believer – in every generation – the responsibility to be alert and discerning and fearless as it relates to false teaching?

In fact, there’s a little letter where John the Apostle actually tells a single mother that it happens to be her responsibility too . . .

Turn back to Second John and let’s pick up our study where we left off.

As you’re turning, in one of our previous studies we identified false teachers and false religions as those who make the same fundamental error – they all, in some way, shape or form, redefine Jesus.

They know that people aren’t going to buy their product if they call it a tooth fish or rapeseed or dried prunes, so they choose more digestible – more acceptable terminology.

- Jesus isn’t ‘eternal deity’, He’s an ‘exalted human’;
- Jesus isn’t ‘sovereign Lord’, He’s a ‘good man’;
- Jesus isn’t ‘the only way to the Father’, He’s ‘one of many ways to Heaven.’

So what do you do about it?

Well, if you look back at **verse 7** – here’s the primary truth you need to remember . . . you’re not going to become an expert in every false religion, but just know that they all go off the road at this same intersection – notice what John writes,

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. (2 John 7)

There you have it. He really isn’t the literal anointed One – the Christos – the Messiah; He isn’t the literal God-in-the-flesh who came to earth. So at some point, they’re going to get Jesus wrong.

So what do you do about it?

1. Keep your eyes open.

The first thing you want to do is keep our eyes open – that’s **verse 8** – we studied that at length in our last discussion.

Watch out . . . stay alert . . . don’t let anyone distract you from running the race and receiving a full reward at the end of it.

First, keep your eyes open.

This is how you handle a heretic!

Keep your eyes open . . . and now, for today, John adds a sentence that spells it out even further.

Keep your eyes open . . . and now, even more specifically – secondly;

2. Keep your door closed.

Verse 10:

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house . . . (2 John 10)

In this postcard, John delivers three commands – and only three.

Watch out, in **verse 8** is the first one; and now here in **verse 10** is the second imperative or command – **do not receive him in to your house** - and you can write in an exclamation point at the end of that phrase.

Do not receive him into your house! Now you might think this would be rude.

Especially in John’s day when traveling was difficult and dangerous. There were few inns available to travelers and they were expensive and crowded . . . and often dangerous.ⁱⁱⁱ

Hospitality was also a matter of Christian good will – even the writer of Hebrews told the early believers to show hospitality to strangers because you might actually end up entertaining an angel. (*Hebrews 13:2*)

That's true . . . but John is warning the Christian here that you might end up entertaining a devil instead.^{iv}

So what's the balance? Well, there are a couple of clues from John to tell us when hospitality is a bad idea.

First, he uses a verb for *come* – translated here at the beginning of the verse – *if anyone comes to you* – to refer to someone arriving at your home with a purpose in mind.^v

In other words, their arrival is intentional. They aren't just in town looking for someplace to give them shelter for the night and you're not going to let them in because they can't pass the theological smell test.

No . . . they are arriving at your door with a purpose to deceive you.

In fact, the word, "if" at the beginning of this text is what's called a first-class-condition, which means they are going to arrive at your door.^{vi}

It isn't "if and they probably won't arrive", but "if *and they will indeed arrive.*" They're going to knock on your door . . . and they are arriving with their disciple making mission in mind.

And now John gives us the most obvious reason you keep your door shut – notice, they arrive at your door – and *they do not bring this teaching.*

That's when the alarm bells need to go off.

They do not bring this teaching. The word for teaching is *didache*, which refers to the truths delivered through Jesus and His apostles.^{vii}

This was the same word used by Matthew when he recorded Jesus delivering his sermon on the mount:

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching.
(Matthew 7:28)

The Apostle Paul ended his letter to the Roman believers by using this same word when he warned them,

Now I urge you brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. (Romans 16:17)

Again, this is the same word and the same warning.

These false teachers are coming to you with different teaching regarding Jesus Christ – His deity, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His sufficient atonement on the cross, His physical resurrection from the grave; His ascension and enthronement in Heaven and His soon return.

If they come to you with something other than the right Jesus – and maybe about now you're wondering how you're going to lead people to Christ if you can't invite them into your home.

Does this mean you can't have unbelievers over for a meal?

No, what John is commanding this woman to do is to refuse to offer ongoing hospitality to the false teacher who essentially wants to set up a class in her living room.

In other words, it is one thing for you to have an unbeliever come into your home to talk to you; but it's another thing if you're having them in your home so *you* can eventually talk to them.

You are the disciple maker.

Listen to the words of Ignatius, a leader in the first century church in Antioch, who more than likely knew the old Apostle John personally.

Ignatius was a lively, colorful writer and he delivered the same warning to the early believers; he writes,

I have learned that certain people from there have passed your way with false doctrine, but you did not allow them to sow it among you. You covered up your ears in order to avoid receiving the

things being sown by them . . . I am guarding you in advance against wild beasts in human form – men whom you must not only not welcome but, if possible, not even meet . . . they are mad dogs who bite by deception; you must be on your guard against them, for their bite is hard to heal.

Ignatius—35-108 AD^{viii}

In other words, just as you're not about to let a rabid dog into your home, don't let a false teacher set up shop in your living room . . . don't open the door to them . . . keep that door closed.

This is how you handle a heretic.

Not only are you to keep your eyes open and keep your door closed; thirdly, John the Apostle commands you to:

3. Keep your wallet shut.

Notice the last phrase in *verse 10*.

And do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (2 John 10b-11)

Now to our ears this sounds like you can't even say hello. Whatever you do, don't even say hello . . . if you see them in Walmart, avoid eye contact – pretend you didn't see them.

No, what John is referring to is an affectionate greeting that implies approval.^{ix}

It's a word that not only gives greeting, but includes the element of joy and fellowship.^x

This is how James opens his letter to the Jewish believers, scattered abroad, ***Greetings!*** (*James 1:1*) – same word.

This same word is used in the New Testament not only as a greeting, but a farewell – translated in Old English as Godspeed, which we've shortened to 'goodbye'.

Don't wish him Godspeed which was tantamount for providing financially for them. Don't spend money taking care of them, which means you're not going to open your wallet for them.

That's what they're really after. In fact, by the end of the first century, the word "Christmonger" was coined for these false

teachers who wanted to profit from gullible followers of Christ.^{xi}

They promise something they can't deliver. They're doing it to this day . . . there's a lineup on cable television.

I was watching one of them on cable television one night myself . . . I obviously had way too much time on my hands. I was curious with what he was going to try and pull off . . . and sure enough, he started asking for money with the promise that he could heal people just like the Apostle Paul could heal if all someone did was touch his handkerchief – which happened in Acts 19 for any sick person who touched the Apostles aprons or handkerchiefs or some other article of their clothing.

Well, this guy said that he was just as apostolically gifted as Paul and he promised that he'd actually send any and all donors one of his own handkerchiefs they could touch and immediately be healed.

I knew the claim was false, because I know the role of the apostle and prophet ceased after the foundation of the church was completed as well as the completion of scripture (***Hebrews 1:1-2***).

But this man's claim was so audacious and I wondered how in the world he could even afford to mail people handkerchiefs. I mean, that would cost a fortune. And I was pretty sure he didn't want to spend a fortune, he wanted to *make* a fortune.

So I sent in a dollar just to see what would happen. I mean, I did have a cold. Sure enough, a few days later, I received an envelope from him and when I opened it up it was a letter thanking me for my seed gift and then it invited me to hold the enclosed handkerchief for my healing – which ended up being a small square piece of paper printed with checkered pattern like a handkerchief. A piece of paper.

I couldn't help but laugh at this scam . . . his promise was as phony as his handkerchief. And I still had a cold.

But I couldn't help but think of all the people who sent in money, hoping beyond hope for a miracle healing.

John says, “Don’t greet these people . . . don’t buy their books . . . don’t send them your seed gifts.”

In fact, let’s bring it closer to home; don’t sit in their congregations while they deny the word of God.

I don’t know how many Christians are putting money in the offering plate, walking out of the church after shaking the hand of the pastor, wishing him Godspeed, all the while troubled in their spirit by the fact that he’s:

- denying the moral standard of God,
- denying the inspiration of scripture,
- denying the exclusive claims of the gospel,
- denying the eternality of Hell,
- denying the literal coming of Christ for the believer,
- refusing to take a stand on truth and against sin.

And well-meaning Christians put money in that church’s offering plate and pay that guy’s salary and shake his hand on the way out and say, “Nice sermon”, all the while knowing they are attending and supporting a church and a church leadership that will not stand for the truth.

I don’t know how many people I’ve talked to over the years who’ve said, “I’d love to attend your church, but I just need to be a light over there at my liberal church.”

Beloved, God never intended any Christian to enter the mission field when they go to church. You can tell your friends I said it - don’t support that wayward church or unbiblical pastor . . . make him go hungry.

Don’t bid him Godspeed . . . keep your wallet shut.

You see, to invite these false teachers into her home, this woman would have had to fed them, given them sanctuary, given them an opportunity to speak to the church that more than likely met in her home . . . no wonder John was passionate in his command – don’t support them – exclamation point!

If you do, John writes here, you’ll become a *partaker in their evil deeds* – the

word John uses for partaker is the word for koinonia – Christian fellowship. You’re actually encouraging the spreading of false teaching by your support.

That would be like saying to that cultist as they leave your front porch, “Hey, let me pray that God will bless you as you continue visiting in my neighborhood.”

No, I would like to say to them, “You’re not going to make headway at my house, and all my neighbors, man they meaner than I am.”

One Puritan author wrote on this text nearly 200 years ago,

Have no religious connection with him, nor act towards him so as to induce others to believe you acknowledge him as a brother.

Adam Clarke—1760-1832^{xii}

Don’t encourage them . . . or enable them . . . which would be, John writes, to participate with them in their ungodly mission to make disciples of their false doctrine.

Now again, this doesn’t mean bringing an unbeliever into your home for Thanksgiving dinner, but making him sit on the back porch; or inviting someone to church, but making them sit in the lobby; or never inviting a skeptic into your home for a transparent discussion on the claims of Christ, or even going to the home of an unbeliever for dinner – which Jesus did often.

This relates to giving a false teacher an opening . . . in this woman’s case, giving them a potential base of operation for their anti-gospel disciple making plans.^{xiii}

I want to add to our outline, because this really takes us back into the word of God – the teaching of God’s word - to study it with renewed passion and doctrinal precision so that we can live with discernment in a world that has turned upside down.

I read recently about a man who’s profession is a ‘cupper’ – in laymen’s terms, he’s a coffee-taster. His taste buds have actually been certified by his home state. So refined over years of practice is his discerning sense of taste that even while blindfolded, he

can take a sip of coffee and tell you not just that it's from Guatemala, but at what altitude it was grown, and on what mountain.^{xiv}

You become proficient at what you practice . . . and what you study.

Be a workman in the word. Paul writes, learn how to study it well and interpret it correctly, so that you won't be ashamed – led astray . . . distracted . . . deceived (**2 Timothy 2:15**).

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism in the early 1700's wrote this in his journal:

God has condescended to teach me . . . He has written it down in a Book. Oh, give me

that book! At any price give me the book of God . . . let me be a man of one book.

John Wesley—1703-1791^{xv}

You want to know how to handle a heretic?

Keep your eyes open;
Keep your door closed;
Keep your wallet shut;
And keep your Bible open.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 03/03/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Erwin Lutzer, Ten Lies About God (Word Publishing, 2000), p. 25

ii <https://pjmedia.com/faith/liberal-pastor-to-ask-gods-blessing-on-abortion-clinic-at-planned-parenthood-holy-ground-event/>

iii John Phillips, Exploring The Epistles of John (Kregel, 2003), p. 203

iv Adapted from Phillips, p. 203

v D. Edmond Hiebert, The Epistles of John (BJU Press, 1991), p. 308

vi Adapted from Gary W. Derickson, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John (Lexham Press, 2014), p. 631

vii Gerhard Kittel, translated and abridged by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Eerdmans, 1985), p. 166

viii Quoted in Derickson, p. 632

ix Hiebert, p. 309

x Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume IX (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 367

xi James Montgomery Boice, The Epistles of John (Baker, 1979), p. 150

xii Quoted in David Guzik, 1-2-3 John and Jude (Enduring Word, 2005), p. 108

xiii Adapted from Douglas Sean O'Donnell, 1-3 John (P&R Publishing, 2015), p. 182

xiv Leonard Sweet, The Gospel According to Starbucks (Waterbrook Press, 2007), p. 54

xv Quoted in David R. Helm, 1-2 Peter and Jude (Crossway, 2008), p. 69