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“SINCERELY WRONG”

A STUDY IN FALSE TEACHING, BASED ON 1 JOHN 2 v18-25

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There is a school of thinking which is very popular at the present time. It goes something like this. “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere”. Of course the advocates of this philosophy have never really thought it through. If they had, they would realise how absolutely ludicrous it is. Think, for example, of the nurse in hospital who gives some medicine to a patient who becomes violently ill. The nurse is sincere, but the medicine is wrong and the patient almost dies.

It takes more than “sincerely” to make something true. Faith in a lie will always have serious consequences. It does matter what you believe. If you want to drive from London to Glasgow no amount of sincerity will get you there if the road you take leads to Cardiff. Truth is vitally important. This is a principle which the Christian Church neglects at its peril.

In 1 John ch 2 v18 the apostle says “antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come.” In the New Testament the word “antichrist” describes any false teacher who opposes or denies Christ as well as the particular individual who will head up the final world rebellion against Christ. The great “anti-Christian” heresy is a denial of the incarnation. This is made clear in 1 John 4 v23:-

“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist.”

You simply cannot be a Christian if you deny the truth of the Incarnation. But notice something else too. If you deny the Incarnation, not only are you rejecting Christ - you are also rejecting Almighty God Himself. 1 John 2 v 22, 23 - “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ. This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father.”

How often have you heard people say - “I believe in God, but I’m not so sure about Jesus.” According to the apostle John, you simply cannot separate the Father and the Son. If you have a defective view of Jesus, then you have a defective view of God. One is implicit in the other. Moreover, if you deny Christ, you cannot know God. You may claim to know God, but in reality you do not. There is no access to God, except through Jesus. Didn’t Jesus himself say “I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, but by me.” (John 14 v6). This means that Muslims, Hindus and Jews do not really know God at all.

What are the safeguards against such heresy? How are we to be kept from being led astray by false teaching? This passage mentions two things. First of all, the importance of staying with the Word of God. Verse 24: “Let what you heard from the beginning abide with you”. Let us make sure that we stay with the original message of the gospel. Don’t go running after new teachings. Stick with “the old old story of Jesus and His love”. All the great heresies which have arisen are due to the fact that people have

wanted to add to the Bible. Think of the Roman Catholic dogmas about purgatory, the worship of Mary and the invocation of saints. All these things have been added to the Scriptures. The Bible contains all that we need to know about the Christian faith. We need no further revelations - whether from mediaeval popes or charismatic prophets.

Secondly, the importance of staying within the fellowship of the church.

Verse 19: "They went out from us but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us".

The word "us" in this verse refers to the local church. We must identify with a local group of Christians, and serve God in that context. Indeed, one of the evidences of spiritual life is a desire to be with the people of God. 1 John 3 v 14 "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." Any group, no matter how religious, that separates itself from a local church which holds to the pure doctrines of the Word of God must immediately be suspect. The New Testament makes it clear that it is dangerous to depart from the fellowship. So many professing Christians have "made shipwreck of their faith." By travelling along this route. If we want to keep on the "straight and narrow" path that leads to eternal life, we must stay within the fellowship of the church.

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