

DERANGED TEACHING IN THE EPISTLES OF ST JOHN

The supposed author of the fourth gospel, John, is believed to have written the first epistle of John. The other two epistles try to pass themselves off as "John's" work too but are not regarded as being from his pen.

The First Epistle of John starts with declaring that they [the apostles?] have received the beginning of something and then touched it and verified it.

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete."

FF Bruce observes that the beginning is the gospel message and not Jesus. Some scholars say it could have a dual meaning - that Jesus is Jesus and is also the gospel message which would mean that to know the gospel of John is to know Jesus. Whatever, it seems that the writer is claiming that they got revelations about Jesus and then met him in visions which confirmed the revelations. The gospel came before the vindication.

The gospel claims that anybody who says he has no sin is a liar and the truth of God is not in him at all. It does not say it just means people who think they have never sinned or people who think they do not sin any more but used to. So clearly it means both. This tells us that nobody alive is completely free from sin. They always have some sin in them. If all sin will be punished with eternal damnation then there is no hope except by somebody like Jesus keeping the law of God for us in our place. The statement that there is no truth of God at all in the person who says they have no sin is an extreme one. Surely there must be some truth in them? But it shows that John was teaching a black and white gospel. We must remember too that many of the religious people claiming to be without sin were civil and decent people in the eyes of their neighbours. John did not have any time for shallow thinking which considers people good just for being okay neighbours. Holiness had to go deeper than that.

In John 6:53, Jesus asserts that unless his listeners symbolically munch his body and drink his blood they will not have life in them. He implied that none of his listeners were on the road to Heaven for life is the fulfilled life which is a life that is closed to God. Jesus said that those "who eat the bread that I shall give shall never die unlike the Israelites in the wilderness who ate the manna and died." If you have no life in you, you are not connected with God at all. This ties in with the bleak spiritual picture presented in the epistle.

We read that we are not to pray for the person who commits the deadly sin and that not all sin is deadly. Catholics say that this is mortal sin which they do not believe because they pray for mortal sinners. When John bans such prayer it is plain that the sinner cannot repent. He must mean the sin of refusing to accept God's salvation on one's deathbed for what else could it be? The text says nothing about a saved person reverting to being an unsaved person. It could be that just as true faith and holiness is a sign of predestination, that certain sins are signs that the sinner is predestined to everlasting damnation and that God has no intention of giving that sinner the gift of faith and salvation.

Some however say that John is not talking about dying people. Indeed there is nothing in the text that explicitly says he is. They argue that if you know homosexuals or adulterers or heretics or murderers then you must not pray for their conversion and just hope they get the Hell that is coming to them. The text certainly does reject the notion that we are not in a position to know who is rejected by God and who is not. Again we have a black and white gospel.

The First Letter of John claims not that Christians need no teacher but that the persons addressed by his letter don't need one.

But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. 1 John 2:27 (ESV) The anointing is usually taken to mean the Holy Spirit. If the people need no teaching then why is he writing to teach them? He means that the Holy Spirit guides people to believe only his teaching. John alone then has preserved the true Christianity.

Christians try to water down John's teachings - usually they say that John had a hyperbolic way of talking. But they cannot give any justification for this view. It is only an excuse. They would not use that excuse if somebody else wrote a letter and

told you to judge adulterers as damned. And John does make it clear he regards his flock as little children so he would not confuse them with poetic hyperbole.

The real Christian does not say a book is the Word of God unless the book indicates that it is the Word of God. Thus it is wrong if you are a Christian to depend on the gospels as God's truth. John is the only exception.

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BIBLE VERSION USED

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