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Living in Perilous Times, Part 5

2 John 7-11

The picture for what life will be like for the believer in this present age is not a pretty one. The Apostle Paul describes it this way:

2 Timothy 3:1-5a, "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power..."

It is little wonder that Christ asked this:

Luke 18:8b, "...when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

The picture painted in Scripture of life in the latter days is one of treachery, hardship, and difficulty for any and all who would live unto the glory of God. Genuine faith is going to be mocked, persecuted, and attacked. And it won't necessarily be in the form of frontal assaults; like imprisonment, torture, or trials. It could also be as the difficulties that Lot experienced living in a secular, godless culture. Peter speaks of how God, "rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men" (2 Peter 2:7).

Even more subtle are the attacks from the very ones whom you trust to shepherd and care for our soul. Christ warned us to “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). The text at which we are looking was written to encourage the body of Christ on account of the many false prophets heading their way.

- Church history records that in 66 A.D. a large number of Christians emigrated from Palestine to Asia Minor.
- They did not flee in order to avoid the turmoil which soon would be caused by the Jewish War of 66-70 A.D. Rather out of love for Christ’s church they were serious-minded missionaries who moved to Asia Minor to address the apostasy that had become so prevalent in the churches at that time.
- Among the missionaries was the Apostle John. In 66 A.D. he moved his family to Ephesus where he labored with and to the churches of Asia Minor.
- While John and the many other believers enjoyed initial success, nevertheless by 80’s things had gotten difficult; not because the people of God had grown bored with Christ but because a “new” breed of pastor and teacher had arisen. These teachers were NOT servants of Christ, BUT of themselves. They were tools in the hand of Satan and they went from church to church devouring people.

This epistle; together with 3 John, 2 Peter, and Jude was written to encourage and strengthen the body against these false teachers. John first laid the commands for what the church ought to do, then he endeavored to impress upon the body the importance of heeding his words; for there was much up for grabs. If the church donned a cavalier attitude when it came to false prophets John told them that their reward could be hindered¹ and that the security of their standing in Christ could be threatened.²

Compromised Service

Yet these are minor in comparison to John’s final warning. John warns the church that if they endured false teachers the integrity of their service would be compromised.

2 John 10-11, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.”

We briefly discussed verse 10 in relation to “The Commands” that John here gives to the body. Recall that John here is NOT saying that...

- We ought not to endeavor to evangelize a lost individual regardless of how deluded they may be.
- It would be wrong, say, to invite a Mormon into your home in the attempt to bring them to Christ.

The idea behind John’s command “not... to give him a greeting” carries the idea of supporting or aiding these false teachers. This is the nuance behind “greeting” in the Bible.

Giving a Greeting

¹ Compare 2 John 8

² Compare 2 John 9

“The Giving of a Greeting” in the Bible involved an endorsement, usually over table fellowship, in which the host gave the right hand of fellowship to the individual. We see this in our text. Notice the order referenced in 2 John 10. First there is the “receiving into ones home.” Then there is the “greeting.” Truly we’re not talking here about evangelism, ministry, or simply saying “Hello” in casual conversation, but the helping, encouraging, housing, and so the endorsing of a false teacher.

Now, most of us would say, “I’d never do something like that!” Really?

The early church did. What makes you think that you are stronger or more mature than they? See, we tend to read how it was in the early church and with confidence conclude that we’d never go about ministry in the way they did...

- Struggling with the issue of eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols.
- Preferring Jewish deacons over Greek deacons — we’re not racist.
- The issue of circumcision as a necessary pre-requisite for ministry much less salvation.

Or in our text, inviting a false teacher into our homes, giving them a meal, and then sending them on their way. All of this and any of this we “laugh off” and say that we would never do anything like this. Yet, you must realize that everything I just mentioned were cultural practices and/or struggles which arose when the early church endeavored to implement Biblical precept. So of course we’re not going to struggle with the first century “circumstances” and “forms” regarding a particular teaching of Scripture. But that they struggled when it came to implementing a Biblical exhortation ought to make us sit up and take note. Why? Because we too most likely will struggle when it comes to implementing the same Biblical precept in our day.³ And this is the case when it comes to “giving a greeting.”

What is the Biblical Precept when it comes to “Giving a Greeting”?

The Biblical Precept for “Giving a Greeting” arises out of the Jewish culture of the first century A.D. It took its form from the Biblical teaching on the Covenant Community. As God continued His work of Redemption following the Fall, the Lord advanced Redemptive History by approaching a specific people and gathering them into a clan. Accordingly from Abraham onward, God’s redemptive work was confined to a Covenant Community.

To be part of this community was to enjoy the blessings of God’s protection, care, oversight, and leading. To be outside of this community was to be a stranger and an alien to the things of the Lord.

Now for 1,800 years up to the time of Christ, there was solidarity amongst the Jews on account of the Covenant such that farmers didn’t harvest their entire crop, but left the corners for the weak and needy in the body. In Judaism there were no laws concerning adoption, for never would a Jewish woman or child be without care. Marriage ceremonies were community affairs in which the entire town

³ When it comes to the commands of God, we make a distinction between Elements, Circumstances, and Forms. For example, God’s word calls us to pray (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ps. 5:3) [or rejoice (1 Thessalonians 5:16) or be thankful (1 Thessalonians 5:18)]- that’s elemental to Christian living and so something we must do. However the circumstances pertaining to the “When?” “Where?” “How long?” and “How often?” AND the form of the prayer (that is its content, do we pray off the top of our head? Or do we pray a psalm?) are left to our discretion. Elements are commands of God. The circumstances and forms of the commands are often times left to the Christian’s discretion.

participated. And no matter where you were and what you were doing, you had a friend and support if you had a Jewish brother or sister nearby.

Accordingly, Jewish men didn't stay at the local inns of the cities to which they had travelled for business they looked up and found fellow Jews who welcomed them into their home. In fact, on account of the Covenant Community it was requisite of all Jews to "give a greeting" to any Jewish traveler they should meet; that is, they were to house, feed, and send them on their way well supplied. By the way, this also became the standard and expectation of the early church.⁴

And so Covenant hospitality was viewed as nothing less than "duty" at the time of Christ.⁵ Now, *you know* there were times when families didn't want to host a stranger, but they did anyway. *You know* that lack of money, conflict in marriage, illness, and the like at times made helping a stranger a burden and an inconvenience. In other words, the Jews/Christians from Abraham onward were not superhuman such that they never struggled with the "giving of a greeting." *You know* at times it had to be a struggle; yet they learned early on that there were some things you just didn't compromise, and the helping of a fellow believer was one of them.

In fact, excelling in this realm was a matter of spiritual maturation; which is why one of the marks of a "man of God" in the qualification list for a pastor is that they needed to be "hospitable." Paul wrote this:

1 Timothy 3:1-2, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach."

Do you know the Greek word for "hospitable?" It is *philoxenon* and so could be translated as, "a lover of strangers." When it comes to calling a pastor in a local church, that man of God must be one who didn't help strangers merely out of duty, but one who genuinely loved investing in people.

Now take all of this and consider the exhortation of John here when it came to the withholding of Covenant love from a fellow Christian. What John is exhorting in this passage was societal suicide for a Christian in that day.

- Not help a fellow believer?
- Turn your back on a Christian in need?
- Neglect a 2,000 year old Covenant-honored tradition?

If you did that you would risk ridicule and a possible shunning from the body. The body would say...

- *What's the matter with you?*
- *We were strangers and aliens and God accepted us; ought we not to do the same for each other?*

What was one of the primary reasons given for why Judah went into exile? They didn't care for their

⁴ Compare also Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:3-10; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:8-10

⁵ In the words of Glenn Barker, *1, 2, 3 John*, EBC, p. 365, "It was an absolute demand that brothers in Christ be supported, fed, and housed by the local congregations they visited."

own.⁶ You must see that the exhortation of John here was huge! *Don't give a fellow Christian a greeting?! You've got to be kidding!*

Now advance the clock 2,000 years and what John writes here is no big deal, at least not in our church culture.

- *O.K. I won't invite Benny Hinn into my house!*
- *I'll stop asking Joel Osteen to drop in the next time he's in Denver.*

Yet if that is our response we've missed the Biblical principle behind the "form" in this text. In a sentence John's exhortation here is that "our expression of love must not involve the support of a deceiver or false teacher in any way!" That's the principle behind John's call NOT to give a greeting.

Now if we consistently live here, we; like the believers in John's day, will suffer ridicule and persecution both from without and within the church. We'll be labeled

- Uncharitable.
- Ungracious.
- Mean spirited.
- Sectarian.
- Narrow-minded.
- Unyielding.⁷

For you see, this and many passages like it indicate that we must be people who exercise Biblical love with discrimination and integrity in conjunction with truth; never in opposition to it. That means our love at times may result in

- Slapping a hand rather than holding it.
- Speaking out against false doctrine or false teaching.
- And in the case of "the wolf in sheep's clothing," it will mean the exposure of their heresy when it is not politically correct to do so .
 - I dare say, never will you be asked to house Benny Hinn or Joel Osteen when they pass through Denver on one of their speaking tours. But you will meet people who love listening to them and you will at times be invited, say at family gatherings, to visit their church.
 - Some of you may have relatives who love their teachings, books, and programs.
 - You may know of an elderly man or woman who stays home on Sunday and watches their programs.

It is in these situations, "the giving of a greeting" will take a more subtle form like this:

- Remaining quiet when a false teacher is endorsed by a co-worker or family member.
- Attending a church or a mass to keep the peace.

⁶ Compare Zechariah 7:10, Amos 5:11-12, Isaiah 3:14-15, and Jeremiah 2:34 and others

⁷ The irony here is that the loudest voices decrying John's words here are the false teachers of our day. C. H. Dodd indicated that John's words here were not "a sufficient guide to Christian conduct." (*Johannine Epistles*, p. 152)

- Smiling when grandma says how much she loves a deceiver, like Joel Osteen.

In these contexts you must see that silence is not golden, but an endorsement. This is what was behind “the giving of a greeting” in the first century culture! Edmund Burke put it this way; “All that is required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.”

At the risk of offending loved ones, co-workers and the like

- We must speak up.
- We can’t be silent.
- We can in no way endorse the workers of iniquity.

Now that doesn’t mean we have to be a jerk about it. Remember, we are NOT called simply to speak the truth; RATHER we are called to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). So be a pastor and skillfully shepherd a soul. Accordingly I hope you see that John’s exhortation here is a call for us to “play the man” and stand for truth in a world where standing for anything is politically incorrect!

- If it is heretical, we must stand against it.
- If it is wrong, we must NOT remain silent.
- We must not clam up in the face of evil.
- We must with humility and grace serve as salt and light to this dead and dying world.

Now in this context, the late James Montgomery Boice offered three suggested guidelines⁸ when it comes to the living out of John’s exhortation.

- First we note that John is not talking of all error but only of that which comes under the guise of Christianity. In other words, John here is not excluding evangelism of Buddhists, Mormons, Jehovah Witness, Muslims, and the like.
- Second, he is not even referring to all those who are in error within Christianity, but only to those who are teachers of such errors in the name of Christianity. If we did a “heresy check” on our children we’d find that at times they can adhere to some pretty strange thinking. Yet we don’t reject them or shun them, we teach them. Why? Because they are disciples! Unless the person is a false teacher or a contentious man, we must view them as disciples who need our loving correction, teaching, and guidance.
- Finally, John here is not even referring to all teachers who err but only to those who are in error on the most fundamental truths and who are actively proclaiming their heresies. There is room to disagree with other preachers and teachers without pulling out the “H-word”- Heresy. Yet when the doctrine in question strikes at the fundamentals of the faith, these teachers and their teaching must be exposed and rejected!

The Implication of “Giving a Greeting” to a False Teacher

And so let us heed the words of John in this epistle. We must in no way endorse a false teacher. Now , why was this “Apostle of love” so strong here? He was so strong because there was so much at stake if

⁸ The Epistles of John, p. 165.

we do otherwise!

2 John 10-11, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds."

This is a sober warning! Again in John's day the "giving of a greeting" was something you did regardless of your time and resources. In fact to neglect the greeting was to incur societal rebuke. Accordingly, there was enormous pressure to acquiesce to this practice regardless of who the visiting stranger may be. Yet to do so when it came to a deceiver/false teacher was to do positive harm when it came to the Kingdom of God.

You say, "I'm not feeling very bold. I have no desire to ruffle the feathers of family or friends by not 'supporting' the false teacher however passive or active the support may be." Well let me ask you these questions:

- How precious is Christ's blood to you?
- What impact is there in knowing that all the hell of Calvary would have been suffered by Christ if it was only you who needed saving?

Charles Haden Spurgeon wrote this:

Pilate delivered our Lord to the lictors to be scourged. This Roman scourging was a most dreadful instrument of torture. It was made of the sinews of oxen, and sharp bones were inter-twisted among the sinews; so that every time the lash came down--these pieces of bone inflicted fearful laceration, and tore off the flesh from the bone. The Savior was, no doubt, bound to the pillar, and thus beaten. He had been beaten before; but this scourging of the Roman lictors was probably the most severe of His flagellations.

My soul, stand here and weep over His poor stricken body. Believer in Jesus, can you gaze upon Him without tears as He stands before you, the picture of agonizing love? He is at once as white as the lily for innocence, and as red as the rose with the crimson of His own blood. As we feel the sure and blessed healing which His stripes have wrought in us, does not our heart melt at once with love and grief? If ever we have loved our Lord Jesus surely we must feel that affection glowing now within our bosoms!⁹

Thomas Kelly wrote this:

Ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate. Mark the sacrifice appointed, see who bears the awful load; 'Tis the Word, the Lord's anointed, Son of Man and Son of God.¹⁰

After gazing upon Christ's blood-stained cross can we take any sin lightly? Is "convenience" a good enough excuse to sin? Ought we to remain indifferent to holiness, Christ's honor, and the extension of

⁹ Charles Spurgeon, Morning Meditation of March 31, based on Isaiah 53:5.

¹⁰ *Trinity Hymnal, 1990, Hymn #257.*

Kingdom of God?

Yet there is something very grave at stake when it comes to the third consequence of enduring the teaching of a deceiver or false teacher; it is NOT that we sin and so know that we've just inflicted another wound upon our Savior (If only that were the case!) RATHER, it is actively promoting, encouraging, and so aiding Satan in his attack against Christ. This is the thrust of these words: "for the one who gives him a greeting participates [literally "fellowships"] in his evil deeds."

In other words, if you and I "give a greeting" to a false teacher; whether we actively or passively support them in any way, you participate in the work of Satan who is the enemy of Christ!

The Betrayal of Christ

Of all the traitors that have existed in the world — Caesar's Brutus, Benedict Arnold, Guy Burgess, Eric O'Neill — Judas Iscariot has to be the most heinous. That night in the garden this devilish fiend approached the Lord to betray Him. Now you must see this was no ordinary traitor.

- Judas witnessed the most loving acts this world has ever seen.
- He participated in the powers of the age to come.
- He tasted of the Heavenly Manna.
- He knew Christ in a way that we never will on this side of the grave.
- Yet filled by Satan this man of perdition betrayed Christ in the garden with a kiss (Matthew 26:48)!

Now most of you here understand that Christ had to be betrayed, He had to suffer on Calvary, and He had to die if we were to be saved. Our sin brought Christ to the cross! Yet, to be the tool of Satan by which our Lord was betrayed and to aid and abet the "accuser of the brethren" and to offer yourself to the devil to further his plans at opposing the reign and rule of Christ in this world is unthinkable. Yet John says here that that is what we do if we endure a false teacher!

In fact, of all that is at stake if we do not watch ourselves, but instead run ahead with the deceiver and his teaching

- The Compromise of our Reward, v. 8.
- The Loss of our Soul, v. 9.
- The Loss of the Integrity of our Service, v. 10.

This participation in their evil deeds is the most serious. We'd rather suffer a thousand deaths than promote the devil's cause. We'd rather suffer forever distance in our walk with Christ than help the adversary. We'd rather go to hell than further Satan's cause. Yet that is what is at stake if we do not heed the exhortation of John in this epistle!

May God give us the grace to become men and women of Christ and so to

- Boldly stand for truth.
- Resist the devil.

- Prefer the pleasures of God to the applause and support of the world.
- Be willing to be persecuted for righteousness if God should be so pleased.

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon (the last few minutes were not recorded because of a power outage during the sermon) and these notes can be found at [Giving False Teachers a Greeting](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on April 26, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.