

How to Recognize and Avoid Heresy

#5

1 John 2:18-27

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Recently the attention of the Christian world has been captured by certain attempts to bring heresy charges against Bishop Pike because of his denials of such important doctrines as the Virgin Birth, the Trinity and eternal punishment. Such attempts at heresy trials are not new in the Christian Church. In every century there have been ecclesiastical leaders who have been charged with heresy. Such charges point up the concern of the Church for maintaining the truth of God as stated in Holy Scripture.
- B. There are those who are sympathetic with Bishop Pike and feel that he is being unjustly persecuted and that the Church has no right to bring charges against him. These sympathizers feel heresy trials are ridiculous and every man should be allowed the right to his own opinion. All worldly and secular men have the right to believe what they want but Christian men can only hold to what the Scriptures teach. Bishop Pike is not a Christian and those that follow him should remember it is the “blind leading the blind.”
- C. A charge of heresy is justified against ecclesiastical leaders who renounce the Faith and it is an exceedingly serious charge. We tend to discount the seriousness because we live in an age where we have made an idol of tolerance. We are told that it does not really matter what we believe, it is what we do and are that counts. But it does matter what people believe because action follows belief. It is belief that produces action and therefore belief is supremely important.
- D. The apostle John in 2:18-27 sees that right belief is important to right action and he sets out to expose heresy.

II. THE NATURE OF HERESY 2:18-21

- A. Introduction: In the First Century, the Church was fighting the heresy of Gnosticism, which denies that Christ was truly God and truly man. Jesus Christ was simply a good man, the best of all men, but He was not God in any sense of the word.
- B. **“Dear children, this is the last hour”** -- In the New Testament the “last hour” may refer to any time between the first and second advents of Christ. This literally says “a last hour”; thus the Apostle John thought that they were in a last hour of the last days.

- C. ***“And as you have heard that the antichrist is coming,”*** -- These early Christians had been instructed that toward the end of the last days or last times the AntiChrist would come, who would be a world dictator that would be a counterfeit Christ and opposed to Christ. He is a real person who will set himself up as God and rule the world politically and religiously.
- D. ***“Even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.”*** -- Before the coming of the Antichrist, there will be many antichrists who will operate in the diabolic spirit of the final Antichrist, who will be inspired of Satan. The many antichrists are forerunners of the one still to come. The spirit of antichrist is already at work in this world. **2 Thess. 2:3-8: “Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming....”** These antichrists spring up inside the visible, professing church; they come in Christ’s name, declaring that they are Christians and teaching true Christianity. Yet as one analyzes their teaching, it is contrary to what God has stated in the Bible.
- E. ***“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us;”*** -- The false teachers of the Gnostic heresy were not saved people who shared the life of Christ in the mystical body of Christ. By their defection from the visible church, they give evidence that they are false and spurious with no real understanding of Christianity. These heretics are apostates who once knew the truth and gave intellectual assent but turned from the truth, proving themselves to be unsaved. Heretics use Christian terminology but give these words different meanings and sooner or later they begin to break away from the true Church. A classic illustration would be Christian Science founded by Mary Baker Eddy. She gives different meanings to Christian words; thus she must publish a glossary of terms at the end of her book.
- F. ***“But their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”*** -- Their defection was permitted by God to show them to be heretics and to protect the elect of God. **1 Cor. 11:19: “No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval.”** Heresy is permitted so that the true Church will band together and the counterfeit Christians will be forced to leave.

Be on your guard for heresy garbed in Christian terminology. There are those who speak of “resurrection” but mean that the soul survives death and deny the resurrection of the body, which the biblical word means. There are others who speak of “evangelism” but do not mean taking the gospel to the world that men

and women might find the forgiveness of sins and eternal life but they mean evangelism to be social work and helping others, which is not a biblical concept. Others speak of Christ as divine but they deny his full deity.

G. ***“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.”***

-- Now John explains why the true Church is not heretics – they have the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ, which keeps them from going into apostasy. This verse does not say “They know all things” but they all know” that is, they have been brought into a saving relationship with Christ through the essential truths of the gospel. This does not mean, of course, that Christians can never go astray, because they do. But it does mean that when they go astray, they do so either because they have been ignorant of the anointing, or are resistant to the teaching of the Holy Spirit within. An if they do go astray, they can only go so far and can never apostatize.

H. ***“I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.”*** -- John’s purpose for writing was not to inform the true believers but to confirm them in the truth they already knew. They had learned that no lie is of the truth. There can never be a mixture of truth and error.

Have you learned that there is no possible harmony between a lie and the truth? There are no grey areas of life. Today we are faced with the heresy of situation ethics or the new morality which is relativism in the realm of moral judgments.

- 1. Stealing is wrong but it is not wrong if you are stealing because you are hungry and need food.*
- 2. If the boss sees you take 50 dollars from the petty cash, drawer, then obviously you have disgraced yourself and the company’s name, having been caught red-handed, and that is wrong. But if you do it without getting caught, it is all right.*
- 3. If you cheat on an examination because you do not like the teacher, then that is wrong. But if you do it because you are desperate to get a good grade to get into college and there is not other way then it is alright to cheat.*
- 4. Premarital sex is wrong if it is done wantonly but if two people love one another the act is perfectly all right.*

The result of situation ethics is obvious. It is a breakdown of all absolutes and it makes right and wrong depend on what society or the individual thinks is right and wrong. In the last analysis it is a repudiation of an absolute, sovereign God with an absolute law of morality.

III. THE CAUSE OF HERESY 2:22-23

A. ***“Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ.”*** -- The first century Gnostics denied that Christ was truly God and truly man. The words

“Christ” and “Son” seem to be equated and the teaching of the Old Testament was that Messiah was to be God. The Gnostics denied that the eternal Christ became a man, becoming God-Man. They made Him a mere man invested with divine powers but they denied that the man Jesus and the Eternal Son were and are the same Person, possessing two perfect natures human and divine. Those who deny that Christ is very God and very man are guilty of the lie – the ultimate lie is the denial of the person of Christ. Present day cults all deny the true deity of Christ – Christian Science says Christ was a mere man upon whom Christ’s spirit came; Jehovah Witnesses say that Christ was a son of God, not the Son of God, who was the first created being. There are many today in the professing Church, going by the names of modernists, liberals, neo-orthodox and new liberals who make Christ only a man with divine qualities. They say Christ is the best of all men; some call him divine but all ultimately deny that Jesus Christ is God. Therefore these folks are heretics! Heretics can always be detected by what they believe about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

- B. ***“Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.”*** – Those who deny that Jesus Christ is the God-Man are guilty of being anti-Christ! Modern day Unitarians deny that Jesus Christ is truly God, the second person of the Trinity. Thus they are heretics.
- C. ***“No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”*** – The Apostle John says, if one does not believe that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh, he does not know or possess the Father. He has no saving relationship with the Father. A person is not a Christian because he believes in the Father but because he believes in the Son, who takes one to the Father. **John 14:1: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”** **John 14:6: “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life: No one comes to the Father except through me.”** The one confessing (acknowledging) Jesus Christ has the Father. **Rom 10:9: “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”**

IV. SAFEGUARDS AGAINST HERESY 2:24-27

- A. ***“See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.”*** – The first safeguard against heresy is to continue in the Apostle’s doctrine. Christians are to let the true gospel that they originally heard dwell or remain in them.

Christians should stay conservative in their theology. To have itching ears, ever running after new teachers, listening to anybody and never arriving at a knowledge of the truth is the mark of an Athenian, not a Christian.

Present day liberals are modernist, and they exemplify the crave of the unsaved mind for something new. In the 1920’s the rage was modernism, in

the 1930's the craze was neo-orthodoxy, in the 1940's it was form criticism, in the 1950's it was neo-liberalism and in the 1960's it is the new morality and the death of God movement. Men will follow anything but the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul said in Gal. 1:8, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!"

- B. ***"And this is what he promised us—even eternal life."*** – Continuing in the true gospel produces fellowship with the Father through the Son and the result of this is the promise of and the experiencing of eternal life. How important is right doctrine? A wrong view of Jesus Christ, the God-Man, will bring the loss of eternal life. What one believes is very important!
- C. ***"I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray."*** – These false teachers were slyly trying to woo true Christians into heresy. Some of the most clever and dishonest people in the world are heretics because they know they have departed from the truth and slyly attempt to bring innocent people into their diabolical cult.
- D. ***"As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you."*** – These Christians had received the Holy Spirit and this is the second safeguard against heresy. True Christians have been taught by God and have no need of false teachers to lead them astray. This verse does not mean that true Christians do not need teachers, for the Bible clearly states that God has given gifted teachers to the Church to instruct them in Christian doctrine and ethics as they are found in the Holy Scriptures.
- E. ***"But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him."*** -- The Holy Spirit is perfect and cannot lie; He has taught the Christian the truth of salvation in Christ. Therefore Christians are to remain (abide, dwell) in the Holy Spirit continually and this will keep him from going into heresy. The Word and the Holy Spirit are necessary to keep the Christian from heresy. The Word deals with the objective Bible and the Holy Spirit deals with His subjective relationship to the experience of the Bible.

V. CONCLUSION

- A. There is hardly a man alive, when his back is to the wall, that doesn't believe in some form of God. This is good but it is not good enough to take a person to heaven.
- B. Jesus said, ***"You believe in God, believe also in me,"*** for ***"I am the way, and the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through me."***