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DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

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Carrying the Teachings

By Dr. Ike Tennison

⁹ Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; ¹¹ for he who greets him shares his wicked work. (2 John 9-11)

The first time I really studied (not just read!) this passage, I came away somewhat puzzled.

The reason I was puzzled had to do with the words “**...does not bring this doctrine....**” *How would the person who goes to answer the door know whether or not the person at the door was bringing this doctrine with him or her?* Many times my doorbell has rung and, when I went to the door, I had no idea who the person standing there was unless he had some identifying mark on him—like the name of his company on a uniform or a badge of some kind, etc. But the writer of the words in the Scripture lesson seems to be very definite about someone being able to tell whether or not the visitor was bringing the doctrine. So what does the writer mean by these words?

You can compare many other translations of the New Testament and will find that the verb translated “bring” above is about the same in them all except obvious paraphrased works like the *New Living Translation*, which gives this meaning to the words in verse 10 -- “*does not teach the truth about Christ.*”

These words do not at all correspond to the Greek text of the words and, in fact, raise as many questions as the original words. How did someone know if a person who showed up at the door “does not teach the truth about the Christ”?

The clear implication of verse 10 is that there was something about the person at the door that gave him away as a follower of the Christ or not. Because of the comment in the last half of verse 10 indicates that the time involved in the

encounter is no more than the time it takes to say "Hello," there must be some visible evidence that demonstrates the stranger's relationship to the Christ.

I believe there is some evidence that such a stranger may have literally carried something that was written that showed that he was a follower of the Christ—like the modern day driver carries a driver's license to prove to a patrolman that he/she has indeed passed that state's minimum standards to be the operator of a vehicle.

At the time when the second epistle of John was written, there was already a great concern among believers about "false apostles" and "false prophets," as is seen in the verses that preceded the verses above.

⁷ I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

This was particularly true because of the number of itinerant preachers and teachers who made the rounds from one city to another. Apparently, only those who believed in and taught the teaching that Jesus is the Christ would be willing to carry around a document that clearly established their credentials. False apostles and prophets would not do so, since the teaching written on the piece of papyrus would be contrary to the message that they were proclaiming. The evidence to support this interpretation of verse 10 comes from a Greek papyrus manuscript dated to the sixth century of the Christian era.

The following commentary and translation come from the book *Selections From The Greek Papyri*, edited by George Milligan (Cambridge: University Press 1901) pages 132-134:

"The following interesting text was discovered by Wilcken in the course of the excavations at Heracleopolis Magna in 1899. **It evidently formed one of those amulets which, as we know, the early Christians were in the habit of carrying in counterpart to the old heathen practice . . . and the fact that the papyrus-roll had been closely pressed together for ease in wearing round the neck** made its decipherment a work of the greatest difficulty. Thanks however to the discoverer's skill and patience the text can now be reproduced in an intelligible form."

"Apart from its general character, the principal significance of the text for us, **lies in the use made of the Lord's Prayer, which here**

takes the place of the meaningless words in the old magical charms . . .

'O Lord God all ruling, The Father, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and thou, O holy Serenus, I Silvanus, the son of Sarapion, pray and bow my head before Thee, begging and beseeching that thou mayest drive from me thy servant the demon of witchcraft . . . and of pain. Take away from me all manner of disease and all manner of sickness that I may be in health. . . to say the prayer of the Gospel (thus): 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth. Give us to-day our daily bread, and forgive our debts, even as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, O Lord of light, true God, graciously give Thy servant light. O holy Serenus, supplicate on my behalf, that I may be in perfect health.'

It is not being suggested that the context of the "teaching" referred to in verse 10 of 2 John would be anything like this piece. Rather, **the point is that at least in the sixth century it was customary for Christians to carry around such an "amulet."** Two or three comments may be in order here because of some of the things said in the quotations above.

First, "the old heathen practice" and "the old magical charms" refer to the practice of the ancients in writing down their requests and questions and leaving these written pieces in the temples of various gods. Not unlike this practice is the papyrus piece on which a Christian prayer had been written (fifth/sixth century), intended to be deposited in some church, just like similar pagan documents were left in the temples.

The prayer said, incidentally, "O God, the all ruling, the holy, the true One, merciful and creative, the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, reveal to me Thy truth, whether Thou wishest me to go to Chiout, or whether I shall find Thee aiding me and gracious. So let it be, Amen." This translation is from the above referenced book, page 131. Second, in the quotation from the "amulet" papyrus, reference is made to "Serenus." This was simply the local patron saint.

At any rate, if the interpretation of verse 10 of 2 John presented in this paper is close to the meaning, **we can surmise that believers in the first century of the Christian era made it a practice to "carry the teaching" as proof of their belief in Jesus as the Christ or their adherence to or faithfulness in the teachings of Jesus, thus not admitting anyone who was not like-minded.** I encourage you to learn more about what was going on in Christianity during the first and second centuries CE. **BHC**

Writings of the Early Church Fathers

Learn more about the first centuries of Christianity by reading the words of those who lived during that period. There are many writings available on the internet and your knowledge of this important transitional period will be enhanced by reading them for yourself.

The Epistle of Barnabas

This is a Greek epistle containing twenty-one chapters written around the end of the first century, preserved complete in the 4th century *Codex Sinaiticus* where it was included as one of the books of the end of the New Testament. It is traditionally ascribed to the Barnabas mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. Some ascribe it to another Apostolic Father of the same name, a "Barnabas of Alexandria," while others attribute it to an unknown early Christian teacher.

The Apocryphon of James

This book is also known by the translation of its title - ***the Secret Book of James***, is a pseudonymous text amongst the New Testament Apocrypha. It describes the secret teachings of Jesus to Peter and James, given after the Resurrection but before the Ascension.

Ignatius of Antioch

Written between 98 and 117 CE, Ignatius was among the Apostolic Fathers, and was the third Bishop of Antioch, and was a student of John the Apostle. En route to his martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius wrote a series of letters which have been preserved as an example of very early Christian theology.

Justin Martyr

Justin wrote around 150 CE and he is one of better known early Christian apologist. Most of his works are lost, but two apologies and a dialogue survive. He is considered a saint by many Christian denominations including the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

The Shepherd of Hermas

It was written in the late 1st or early 2nd century CE and was an important book for many Christians. It was included in the New Testament by some groups and was listed between the Acts of the Apostles and the Acts of Paul. The work comprises five visions, twelve mandates, and ten parables. It relies on allegory and pays special attention to the Church, calling the faithful to repent of the sins that have harmed it.

Links to the above books, as well as many other early Christian and Jewish texts are found at our website under "Ancient Texts" --

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Page 4

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