

Doctrine of Christ:

2 John 9

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The main concern in the right use of the Word of God is its proper interpretation. Whether preaching is textual or topical or expository it rests ultimately upon the minister's interpretation of the Word of God. That theological discipline which takes as its goal the proper interpretation of Scripture is hermeneutics. A solid hermeneutics is the root of all good exegesis and exegesis is the foundation of all truly Biblical preaching. Therefore a sound hermeneutics is an absolute *desideratum* for the minister of the Word of God.¹

What did John mean by the “teaching of Christ” (2 John 9, NIV) in this short letter “to the chosen lady and her children” (v. 1)? Second John 9 is called forth to justify separation from other Christians who do not always agree with another group of Christians on certain doctrinal issues. Unfortunately, the “teaching of Christ” (“doctrine of Christ,” KJV) is used by many Christians to fracture the body of Christ. Within many fellowships, the “doctrine of Christ” includes whatever the particular fellowship espouses. Just what does the “doctrine of Christ” mean? Does the “teaching of Christ” in 2 John 9 condemn instrumental music in the so-called corporate worship service? Does this verse denounce the use of a plurality of cups in the distribution of the fruit of the vine in the observance of the Lord's Supper? Do we break the rules found in 2 John 9 for participation in teaching children on Sunday in a Sunday school classroom? Do we transgress 2 John 9 if we use wine instead of grape juice in the communion? Do we overstep 2 John 9 if we “break” the bread instead of “pinching” the bread? If we practice “hand clapping” in the assembly, do we violate the “teaching of Christ” in 2 John 9? Can we sing a “solo” in the congregation and not disobey the “teaching of Christ” in 2 John 9? These are questions that need answering!

Almost every split (approximately twenty-five) within the Stone/Campbell Movement² cites this particular Scripture to uphold their doctrinal purity and to justify their separation from

¹Bernard L. Ramm (1916-1992), “Biblical Interpretation,” in Bernard L. Ramm, editor, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 5, 6.

²For an objective story of the Stone/Campbell Movement, see Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of the Three Churches* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 1981).

other believers who do not always see “eye-to-eye” with the so-called infallible interpreters.³ If we do not condemn instrumental music in the so-called worship assembly, then, 2 John 9 is cited to justify the “meat cleaver” action against any who would dare disagree with the splinter group cry. If we seek to have fellowship with those who employ instrumental music in their worship service, then, 2 John 9 is applied,⁴ even though they themselves may not use the instrument.

Since there is much controversy over the phrase “doctrine of Christ” (**διδασχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *didachē tou Christou*) in John’s Second Epistle, it is incumbent upon all Christians to seek to ascertain the meaning employed by the author. Just what did John mean by this particular expression? The purpose of this chapter is to discover the intent of the writer in order that we might unite rather than divide over so many trivial positions. To arrive at a correct understanding of how John utilizes this phrase, it is necessary to examine the Greek genitive (Christ).

Should we interpret “doctrine of Christ” as the “**teaching of Christ**” (subjective genitive— **διδασχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**) or “teaching **about Christ**” (objective genitive— **διδασχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**)? The context will have to decide! The immediate surroundings generally serve to exhibit the writer’s own definition. The subjective genitive is the most widely advanced belief among the Churches of Christ as well as other denominations. Each division within the Churches of Christ claims this particular Scripture (2 John 9) as its own. It just so happens, according to each faction, that the “doctrine of Christ” represents one’s own brand of orthodoxy. To disagree with a particular fellowship is tantamount to not abiding in the “doctrine of Christ.”

³For a classic example of this mindset, see Ray Dutton, “To: The Elders of the Landmark church of Christ” in *Seibles Road Church of Christ (November 3, 1996): 1-3, where*, in his condemnation of Buddy Bell, pulpit minister for the Landmark Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL, he says (p. 3):

The apostle John told us exactly how we are to handle false teachers who come to us with their apostasies: *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.* (2 Jn. 9-11).

On page 3, of this same article, he writes: “When I asked Buddy if he believed solos, choirs, and quartets were scriptural in worship, he did not even hesitate with his answer. He told me in no uncertain terms that he believed that the practice of using solos, choirs, and quartets was in his words. ‘very scriptural.’”

⁴See **C. A. Smith**, “Special Music” in *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4-5, where he writes:

Unless someone shows me I am wrong. I cannot bid “God speed” to such for I would be guilty of endorsing that which I believe is a dangerous practice. (2 John 9-11), and that would make me a partaker in their evil deeds. As I have heard brother **Lynwood Smith** [1924-2007] say, several times: “I am Church of Christ to the core, and I hope that it shows in every area of my walk for the Lord.” Nobody likes good singing better than I do, but let us please respect God’s Word, the church, our brethren and ourselves and use it to glorify and praise God.

SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

Imperfection in knowledge

It is imperative that we understand “doctrine of Christ” (διδασχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *didach tou Cristou*) [KJV] in 2 John 9 in order to promote unity for which Christ prayed (John 17). First, if we interpret “doctrine of Christ” as the teachings of Jesus concerning a worship service (subjective genitive—**διδασχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *didachē tou Christou*), which is the common interpretation of 2 John 9, then for one to disagree with the status quo of a particular group is in essence to disagree with the “doctrine of Christ.” This point of view equates our own particular interpretation of the Scriptures concerning church organization and the so-called social worship service as on equal footing with the Word of God itself.⁵ When this happens, then, this mishandling of the Word leads to some exegetical problems. For example, no one has flawless knowledge of God’s written Revelation. Paul deals with this “know-it-all” attitude in the Corinthian letter. Christians, according to Paul, can be mistaken about some doctrinal issues and still abide in the “doctrine of Christ.” Imperfection in knowledge, “in-and-of-itself,” does not mean that we are not abiding in the “doctrine of Christ.”

Listen to the words of Paul as he sets forth this concept of imperfection in knowledge: “We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God” (1 Corinthians 8:1-3). Did we catch this phrase? “The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know”? What does this Scripture mean? Is Paul advancing the concept that “blemish” in knowledge is tantamount to damnation? Is he advancing the notion that “deformity” in knowledge is the same as not abiding in the “doctrine of Christ”?

How do we reconcile the following statement of Paul (Romans 14:1) to the common (subjective genitive) interpretation of 2 John 9? We would do well to listen to Paul as he discusses toleration for the weak in understanding: “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters” (Romans 14:1). Is this spirit of toleration the same attitude that we practice in dealing with differences within the Christian community? Do we advance the same spirit of mercifulness for imperfection in knowledge that Paul admonished the Romans to adhere to? Again, we should give careful attention to the Holy Spirit’s words: “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5). Do we read this as, “Each one should be fully convinced according to my own mind”? Have we substituted “my” for “theirs”?

⁵Within the Churches of Christ, generally, the “doctrine of Christ” centers on one’s concept of the “five acts” of worship. In other words, five rituals performed in a precise manner are imperative for us to abide in the “doctrine of Christ.” If we employ instrumental music in worship, then we are not abiding in the “doctrine of Christ.” If we employ Sunday school in the teaching of children and adults, then we are not abiding in the “doctrine of Christ.” If we utilize individual cups in the communion, then we are not abiding in the “doctrine of Christ.” If we take money out of the church treasure to assist individuals who are not Christians, then we are not abiding in the “doctrine of Christ.” The list is almost without measure.

Holiness of Life

A second alternative⁶ to the “doctrine of Christ” (subjective genitive) is the *teachings* of Jesus Messiah to His disciples. For example, the Sermon on the Mount is an illustration of the teachings of Jesus.⁷ Yet, this understanding of the phrase cannot be understood in an absolute sense. For instance, how many Christians abide in the “teachings of Christ” in an absolute sense? The wording of 2 John 9 does not allow for departure: “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God.” Yet, John clearly states that no man is without sin: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

There are **no mitigating circumstances** for John. Anyone who does not abide in the “doctrine of Christ” does not have God. Surely John is not writing about sinless perfection in one’s life. John, earlier, had rebuked individuals who maintained that they had no sin (1 John 1:10). God forbid that any Christian should be guilty of the sin of “perfectionism.” None of us has perfect knowledge. None of us lives a perfect life. We are all striving unto perfection in both zones.

Subjective Genitive: Noun in the Genitive Produces the Action

What is meant by subjective genitive? The subjective genitive occurs when the noun in the genitive⁸ produces the action. To illustrate this principle, it is helpful to review another well-known passage in the Pauline corpus: “If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ’s love (*ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, *agapē tou Christou*) compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died” (2 Corinthians 5:13-14). The context clearly indicates that the noun in the genitive (Christ, Χριστοῦ) means the love that Christ has for us, not our love for Christ. The context shows that the phrase (Christ’s love) refers to the love which Christ has for us. That is to say, Jesus is the

⁶This second alternative is not under consideration from the context—even though John addresses ethical behavior in this Second Epistle. The context for “doctrine of Christ” appears to have reference to the confession that Jesus had come in the flesh.

⁷ John addresses the teachings of Jesus in his Gospel and his Book of Revelation, as well as his Epistles. No one denies that one can be in fellowship with God and, at the same time, flagrantly flaunt the teachings of Christ in his or her daily life. See 2 John 4-6 in which he deals with loving one another as Jesus commanded. See also 1 John 2: 3-6. “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did,” writes John (v. 6). It is worthy of notice that even the scholars that advance the subjective genitive, still do not advance the notion of absolute perfection in holiness, on the part of men and women, as prerequisite to fellowship with God. When they speak of subjective genitive, their writings indicate that they have in mind the teachings of Jesus as found in the Sermon on the Mount, not rules and regulations to govern five acts to be performed on Sunday morning.

⁸For an explanation of “case” in Greek, see Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman, 1950), 16-18.

one doing the loving. The noun (Christ—Χριστοῦ) in the genitive produced the action. It is not the case that determines the point, but the context.

One more illustration is in order to clearly demonstrate the use of the subjective genitive. Paul employs the subjective genitive when he writes about Jesus' preaching: "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ" (ὁ κήρυγμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *ho kērygma Iēsou Christou*) [Romans 16:25]. Jesus produced the preaching. In other words, the preaching was not about (objective genitive) Jesus, but rather the proclamation of the Good News by Jesus Messiah (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *Iēsou Christou*) Himself.⁹

Objective Genitive: Noun in the Genitive Receives the Action

What is meant by the objective genitive? The objective genitive receives the action of the noun. The subjective genitive produces the action of the noun. An example of the *objective genitive* is found in Jesus' rebuke of the religious authorities: "I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit (πνεύματος βλασφημία, *pneumatōs blasphēmia*) will not be forgiven" (Matthew 12:31).¹⁰ The noun "Spirit" did not produce (subjective) the action ("blasphemy") against Himself, but rather He received (objective) the action. Again, it is the context that determines the meaning, not the case in-and-of-itself. The noun πνεύματος (*pneumatōs*) is spelled the same in Greek. It is only the context that determines whether the noun in the "genitive" is *subjective* or *objective*.

As stated above, many sincere Christians rely upon 2 John 9 to justify their disconnection from other believers on the basis that they are not continuing in the "doctrine of Christ" ("teaching of Christ," NIV). But many sincere Christians have not weighed the context very carefully to determine whether the noun in the genitive produced the action or received the action. In other words, did the genitive (Christ, Χριστοῦ, *Christou*) produce the action (teaching produced by Christ), or is the genitive the receiver of the action (teaching about Christ having come in the flesh)?

In seeking a correct answer to the problem of interpretation in 2 John 9, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that no person has a right to foist into his or her expositions of Scripture one's own dogmatic speculations, or the interpretation of others, and then insist that these conclusions are an essential part of divine Revelation. Many Christians misapply this Scripture to uphold their sectarian attitude (not deliberately in my judgment) toward those who do not conform to their particular brand of orthodoxy concerning a so-called worship service.¹¹

⁹See Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927), 78.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹I do not think this misuse of 2 John 9 is deliberate on the part of those men and women seeking to be true to the Word of God. In spite of their sincerity, it is necessary to draw attention again to the fact that the whole system of God's Revelation must be explained so as to be consistent with itself. In order to ascertain the meaning that is attached to any word or phrase, we must examine the context. The word "context" is from Latin, which means to "weave together" and is applied to written documents. The context is the connection of thought that runs through every passage, which constitutes for itself a whole. The immediate context is that which

If we approach the Scriptures with our own pre-conceived impressions and are anxious to put our own sense upon the text that coincides with our own sentiments rather than the thoughts of the author, then we will never be able to arrive at a correct understanding of the passage in question.

SCHOLARSHIP: OBJECTIVE GENITIVE

There are many eminent scholars who understand the genitive “of Christ” (Χριστοῦ, *Christou*) in 2 John 9 as *objective genitive* (receives the action), not *subjective genitive* (produces the action). Thus the phrase, as interpreted by many scholars, means “doctrine about the person of Christ” (**objective genitive**) rather than the “teachings of Christ” (subjective genitive). The following commentaries illustrate the *objective genitive* in their interpretation of the context of 2 John 9:

Rudolph Bultmann

Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976), who was Professor of New Testament and Early History of the University of Marburg, wrote:

Τοῦ Χριστοῦ [*Tou Christou*, “of Christ”] may be taken as a subjective genitive; it is more probable, however, that “of Christ” is an objective genitive, since the author hangs everything on his Christology, i.e., on the doctrine about Christ, as v. 7 shows. Judgment is passed on the disciple of the heretical doctrine by the phrase, **θεὸν οὐκ ἔχει** [*theon ouk echei*, “does not have God”]; this corresponds to 1 Jn 2:23, where it is said of “the one denying the Son,” **οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει** [*oude ton patera echei*, “he does not have the Father”]. That means: he stands outside the fellowship of God.¹²

David Smith

Dr. David Smith’s comments on this verse (2 John 9) also capture the very heart of John’s concern over Gnostic rejection of Jesus having come in the flesh:

Τῆ διδαχῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ [*Tē didachē tou Christou*, “doctrine of Christ”]. The teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ (1 Jn. 4:1-2), i. e., the Messiah, the Savior.¹³

Kenneth Wuest

Also, Kenneth S. Wuest (1893-1962), instructor in New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, expresses his agreement with David Smith:

immediately precedes or follows a given word, phrase, or sentence. Not only must the context be considered, but one must also investigate the scope and plan of the author.

¹²Rudolph Bultmann, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, Hermeneia Series* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 113.

¹³David Smith, “The Epistles of John,” in *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 202.

“Doctrine” is *didache*, “teaching,” namely, that which is taught. Smith says that it is the teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. We have a genitive of reference, “teaching with reference to Christ. . . .” The person therefore, who goes beyond the teaching of the incarnation of the Son in human flesh, thus denying the incarnation does not possess God in a saving relationship.¹⁴

Leon Morris

Leon Morris (1914-2006), Principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, and Canon of St. Paul’s Cathedral, Melbourne, paraphrases:

So if a man does not bring this doctrine (i.e., the doctrine that Christ is God incarnate) he is not to be received.¹⁵

George Johnston

Another scholarly witness in favor of the *objective genitive* is George Johnston, Principal of United Theological College and Professor of New Testament Studies at McGill Univ., Montreal. He, too, leaves no doubt that the “doctrine of Christ” must refer to the incarnation. Johnson calls attention to 2 John 7 as commentary on 2 John 9. He concludes from the context that “doctrine of Christ” must be objective genitive. We should pay attention to his brief comments:

The doctrine of Christ” must refer to the point in dispute at 7 [verse] and in 1 John; so the genitive is objective.¹⁶

Lehman Strauss

Lehman Strauss (1911-1986) also interprets 2 John 9 as *objective genitive*:

Twice in this one verse we read the phrase “the doctrine of Christ.” The word *doctrine* (Greek, *didachē*) means “teaching.” John is not referring here merely to those doctrines which Christ taught, but rather teaching with reference to Christ, teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour. . . . In view here [2 John 10-11] are the false teachers who come with false teachings. They do not believe nor teach the true doctrine, namely, that Christ is God manifest in flesh. These teachers are not Christians at all. They are not true witnesses of Jehovah; they are actually the devil’s witnesses.¹⁷

¹⁴Kenneth S. Wuest, *In These Last Days: Studies in the Greek Text of II Peter, I, II, III John and Jude*, Wuest’s Word Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 206.

¹⁵Leon Morris, “2 John,” in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, ed. D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1272.

¹⁶G. Johnson, “I, II, III John,” in Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley, ed., *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 1039.

¹⁷Lehman Strauss, *The Epistles of John* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1972), 153, 154.

Donald Burdick

Donald Burdick (b.1917), in keeping with his comments on 1 John 2: 24, explains:

John contrasts the one who goes beyond and the one who remains “in the doctrine of Christ” in verse 9. This doctrine is not teaching which comes from Christ; instead it is the teaching concerning Christ’s incarnation which John has already pointed out in verse 7.¹⁸

E. M. Blaiklock

In concluding the *objective genitive* scholarship, one more scholar is in order to again set forth the context of 2 John 9. Edward Musgrave Blaiklock (1903-1983) is perfectly correct, as it appears from the context, when he says:

A Jesus any less than God in flesh appearing cannot be a Saviour. Any doctrine which takes away from Christ’s full deity is no doctrine at all. It is antichristian, destructive, ruinous. . . . The “teaching of Christ” is the teaching which stresses the fact that Christ was God’s revelation of Himself, the full and final message to man. Any other version of Christ, any distortion of the record, loses not only the Christ John had known but loses God too. Christ was the way to the Father. Lose one and the other is lost. Such warning is timeless.¹⁹

Even though several eminent scholars have been quoted here, it should be remarked that a nose count is not really worth anything except to illustrate the popularity or respectability of a view. Often one author accepts a plausible-sounding view presented by others without really making a meticulous study of the matter. No one person has the opportunity to study every issue with complete thoroughness. Ultimately, only the context matters, not what various people think. In fairness to those who espouse the *subjective genitive* (teachings of Christ), it is necessary to also cite scholars of equal scholarship that postulate that the *doctrine of Christ* is the teaching by Christ (subjective), not the teaching about Christ (objective).

SCHOLARSHIP: SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

John R. W. Stott

The *subjective genitive* concept is fully worked out by John Stott (1921-2011) in his excellent commentary on the Epistles of John. He disagrees with Smith, as cited above, that the genitive should be interpreted as *objective genitive* and not as a *subjective genitive*:

At first sight this phrase, literally ‘doctrine of the Christ’ (NEB), might be taken as meaning ‘the teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ’ (Smith), and this would suit the context well. But the

¹⁸Donald W. Burdick, *The Epistles of John* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), 107.

¹⁹E. M. Blaiklock, *Letters to Children of Light: Commentary on First, Second & Third John* (Glendale, California: Regal Books, 1975), 117, 118.

‘usage of the N. T.’ (Westcott, Brooke) requires that the genitive be interpreted not as objective, ‘the teaching about Christ’, but as subjective, ‘Christ’s teaching’. This no doubt includes what Christ continued to teach through the apostles (cf. Acts i. 1; Col. Iii. 16; Heb. Ii. 3). Such authoritative apostolic doctrine is equivalent to what in his First Epistle John called ‘what you heard from the beginning’ (ii. 24, RSV; cf. Ii. 7, iii. 11; Jn. Viii. 31; 2 Tim. Iii. 14 and 2 Jn. 5, 6).²⁰

Kenneth Grayston

Kenneth Grayston (1914-2005), Methodist preacher and New Testament scholar, objects to the *objective genitive* in his commentary on the Johannine epistles:

The misleading views of the **deceivers** had little to do with Docetism: their refusal, as the elder makes plain, consisted of abandoning the teaching of Christ (*didachē tou Christou*). RSV and NEB, but not GNB, JB, and NIV, translate *didach* by **doctrine**, which in modern usage inevitably suggest a formulated Christology and implies an objective genitive (teaching about Christ). But the genitive could equally be subjective (teaching given by Christ), referring to Christ’s teaching about love both by his words and his actions.²¹

A. T. Robertson

Archibald Thomas Robertson (1863-1934), the greatest Greek scholar in America, also advances the idea that the “doctrine of Christ” (subjective) is the teaching that Christ taught:

Not the teaching about Christ, but that of Christ which is the standard of Christian teaching as the walk of Christ is the standard for the Christian’s walk (I John 2:6).²²

Marvin R. Vincent

Marvin Richardson Vincent (1834-1922), also a reputable scholar, postulates the “doctrine of Christ” as *subjective genitive*:

Not the teaching *concerning* Christ, but the teaching of Christ Himself and of His apostles. See Heb. Ii. 3. So according to New Testament usage. See John xviii. 19; Acts ii. 12; Apoc. Ii. 14, 15.²³

CHURCHES OF CHRIST: SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

Many within the Churches of Christ apply a very unique interpretation to 2 John 9. Generally, the “doctrine of Christ” is associated with a particular brand of orthodoxy. Almost

²⁰John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 212.

²¹Kenneth Grayston, *The Johannine Epistles*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 154.

²²A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: General Epistles and Revelation of John*, vol., 6 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), 254.

²³Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol., 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 396.

all major divisions within the Churches of Christ cite this verse as their verse. To some Christians, the “doctrine of Christ” is associated with one-cup, non-Sunday school, instrumental music, divorce and remarriage, wine, grape juice, bread breaking, bread pinching, orphan homes, Bible colleges, and so on. Seldom do the journals (Churches of Christ) on 2 John 9 ever refer to the “doctrine of Christ” as “loving one another” or adhering to the teachings of Christ as expounded in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).²⁴ A few citations from some of the Church of Christ journals or lectureships should illustrate this illegal utilization of 2 John 9. To illustrate, it is necessary to cite a few examples of godly men to set forth the presupposition.

J. Noel Meredith

In The Sixth Annual Denton Lectures (November 8-12, 1987), Noel Meredith delivered a lecture on “False Teachers and How to Deal with Them (2 John 7-13).” In this lecture he identifies, among other things, the employment of instrumental music in the so-called assembly as tantamount to not abiding in the “doctrine of Christ.” He writes,

The kind of sin under consideration (verse 9) here is one in which one is progressing beyond the doctrine of Christ; he does not abide in the doctrine of Christ. When division arose in the church over the use of instrumental music in worship, those who used it styled themselves as “progressives” and they stigmatized those who adhered to the original mode of worship—singing God’s praise unaccompanied (Eph. 5:19)—as “non-progressives.” There is a very definite fitness in these terms. Instrumental music was not commanded by Christ, no apostle ever sanctioned it, no New Testament writer ever authorized it, and no apostolic church ever practiced it. To use instrumental music in worship is indeed to be “progressive”—to “progress” beyond the things which are written.²⁵

C. A. Smith

Smith, one-cup and non-Sunday school, complains of a visit to one of the “brotherhood meeting houses” in which “brothers and sisters in Christ put on a concert.”²⁶ He complained that one would see the same thing if one attended “the Stamps Quartet, Statesman Quartet, Imperials and etc., (sic) with showmanship, rousing applause, hollering and other gestures.”²⁷ He goes on to say that this did not occur during a “Worship Service,” but he continues, “If you can use the church buildings for such carryings on, what would be wrong in our using our buildings for a ‘Ladies Lectureship.’ ‘A Style Show,’ or ‘A Political Rally?’²⁸ How does he justify condemnation of the “Sunday afternoon” singing?” Listen to his proof text:

²⁴I am not saying that Christians who apply 2 John 9 to other Christians that disagree with them over doctrinal matters would not advance the teaching that we should live pure lives. All I am saying is that this concept of ethical teaching is not generally stated in their expositions of this much abused text.

²⁵J. Noel Meredith, “False Teachers and How to Deal with Them,” in *Studies in 1, 2, 3 John*, Sixth Annual Denton Lectures, Dub McClish, ed. (Denton Texas: Valid Publications, 1987), 270.

²⁶C. A. Smith, “Special Music,” *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4, 5.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸*Ibid.*

Unless someone shows me I am wrong. I cannot bid “God speed” to such for I would be guilty of endorsing that which I believe is a dangerous practice. (II John 9-11), and that would make me a partaker in their evil deeds. As I have heard brother Lynwood Smith say, several times: “I am Church of Christ to the core, and I hope that it shows in every area of my walk for the Lord.” Nobody likes good singing better than I do, but let us please respect God’s Word, the church, our brethren and ourselves and use it to glory and praise God.²⁹

We wonder how praising God in song can be classified as “evil deeds.” To sing in a quartet is a “dangerous practice,” according to Smith. Is 2 John 9 the Scripture that condemns quartet singing in a church building? Is this what John is saying?

Carl M. Johnson

Johnson, another one-cup and non-Sunday school believer, calls attention to unity meetings that Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) and others conducted. He erroneously states that “Ketcherside argued that there are no doctrines other than the teachings concerning the person of Christ (that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah) that are serious enough to justify a break in fellowship among believers.”³⁰ Since Ketcherside sought to recapture the spirit of unity for which Jesus prayed, Johnson justifies his separation from Ketcherside through his citation of 2 John 9:

The Apostle John warns, “Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). In an effort to harmonize his own position with John’s words, Ketcherside argued that the expression “doctrine of Christ” does not refer to all that Jesus taught personally and through His apostles, but it refers to teaching about the nature, or the deity of Christ only. By limiting the meaning of “doctrine of Christ” in 2 John to teaching about the deity of Christ, Ketcherside and his supporters could extend open fellowship to all “sincere believers” regardless of their doctrine and practice.³¹

Johnson assumes that John is talking about what Johnson believes, but is this the case? What is the context for 2 John 9?

INSTRUCTIVE PARALLEL OF 1 JOHN 2:22-23 AND 2 JOHN 9

When we are in doubt about the correct interpretation of a passage of Scripture that is obscure in our minds, we should search for parallel constructions to assist us in correctly handling the Word of Truth. Illumination is often found when we compare Scripture with Scripture. A cardinal rule of explanation is that the *obscure* should be interpreted in the light of

²⁹Ibid. Even though this citation is found in footnote 4, I have recited this quotation in order to emphasize the mindset of this sincere believer.

³⁰Carl M. Johnson, “Trojan Horse in the Church,” *Old Paths Advocate* LXX, No. 2 (February 1996): 1.

³¹Ibid., 1.

the *clear*, never the reverse. The interpreter is bound to consider how the subject lay in the mind of the author and to point out the exact ideas and sentiments intended. To illustrate the above principles of exposition, we should place 1 John 2:22-23 in parallel columns with 2 John 9. First John 2:22-23 is an instructive parallel to 2 John 9. I have place the following thought patterns in parallel lines:

1 John 2:22-23

2 John 9

<p>Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist</p>	<p>Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ</p>
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—he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son

has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son

has the Father also.

Does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching

Has both the Father and the Son.

These two citations constitute a real parallel, that is to say, a parallel of ideas. The Word of God is an organic unity of which all parts are mutually related and are subservient to the whole of God’s Revelation. The Bible is its own best interpreter. From the parallel passages, one can sense that 2 John 9 is a restatement of 1 John 2:22-23. The denial that Jesus is the Christ is nothing more or less than a denial of God. To make 2 John 9 apply to instrumental music, individual communion cups, Sunday school, handclapping, raising hands, taking money out of the church treasury to assist individuals who are not Christians, and so on, is to tear this Scripture out of its context.

GNOSTICISM

If we are to interpret “doctrine of Christ” (KJV) or “teaching of Christ” (NIV) correctly, we must look to the context and to its background. From the immediate context as well as the remote context (the book itself), it is apparent that John wrote to combat the errors of Gnosticism.³² The Gnostics were denying the Incarnation. They insisted that Christ never had a flesh-and-blood, physical, human body. They also taught that spirit alone is good and matter alone is utterly evil. Given that point of view, then, any real Incarnation is impossible.

³²For a thorough analysis of “Gnosticism,” see William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977; originally published in 1958), 3-20.

John's concern with Gnosticism is especially seen in the following verses:

2 John 7

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.

1 John 4:1-3

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

The Gnostics, who denied Christ having come in the flesh, were not to be received by Christians: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching (ταύτην τὴν διδασχὴν οὐ φέρει, *tautēn tēn didachēn ou pherei*, ‘brings not this teaching’), do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (2 John 10-11). Earlier, as cited above, John warns: “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” (2 John 7). These two Scriptures shed light on verse 9: “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ (διδασχὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *didachē tou Christou*) does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.”

CONCLUSION

A correct interpretation of 2 John 9 does not advocate looseness in adhering to the teachings of Christ as advanced in the Sermon on the Mount. Both epistles of John address holiness as characteristic of every believer. The teachings that Jesus commanded in the great commission relate to the Sermon on the Mount and are summed up in this command: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **mind**.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” The “teaching of Christ” in 2 John 9 does not refer to the Sermon on the Mount, but rather, to the teaching about Christ’s humanity (Incarnation). Christians should not tear 2 John 9 out of its context, and, then, employ

this passage as a meat cleaver to hack to death all those who disagree with their party cry for their own prevailing beliefs, which originates out of their own “interpretive community.”³³

³³Interpretive communities are composed of members who share a particular reading “strategy,” or a “set of community assumptions.” See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed . (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 271. See also Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980).