

Dealing with Controversial Opinions

1 John 4:1-6

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The churches that John had planted were facing division and confusion over matters of faith – similar to those we face today. John gives the call to guard our Christian fellowship.

4 Vital Distinctions:

I. Not 'Your' but Our

John gives a call to be watchful and vigilant about the things we hear and are taught (v1). Behind every teaching lies either the Spirit of God or something else.

2 realities:

#1 Teachings and philosophies that are not from God may still appear to be so.

#2 The problem of false teachings and philosophies is not outside the church, but inside the church.

'Beloved' (v1) is an intimate term of endearment that John used to address all the Christians in the churches. Guarding Christian fellowship is built on love and it involves everyone. Guarding Christian fellowship is the loving responsibility of every member.

II. Not 'What' but Who

Testing teachings and philosophies is not first about their content; it is a matter of who is glorified through them (vv. 2-3a). If a teaching glorified Jesus, it is from God. If a teaching compromises the gospel, it is not from God but somewhere else. Savouring the gospel of Jesus Christ is a sure shield around Christian fellowship. While the gospel offers a very peculiar take on life, delighting in it allows us to point out the false teachings that might parade itself as coming from God.

III. Not 'Fear' but Faith

The antichrist is an enemy of Christ who will appear right before Jesus returns, deceiving the world into denying the true Christ. John is not referring to *the* antichrist (v3b), but the spirit of the antichrist that is already in the world (1 John 2:18). There is no such thing as

neutral teachings or philosophies; every teaching and philosophy comes either from the spirit of God or the spirit of the antichrist.

3 assurances against falling into fear (v4)

#1 We are from God and belong to the God of the universe, and He has set His love upon us.

#2 We have overcome the antichrists because

#3 He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world – the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27)!

The Antichrist desires anti-faith, but Christian fellowship rests in anti-fear.

IV. Not 'Harmony' but Holiness

John draws a distinct line between the world and Christian fellowship (vv. 5-6a). The false teachers are from the world and the true teachers are from God. It is only those who are from God and filled with the Holy Spirit who will recognise the truth of the gospel and obey it (v6). There is an unbridgeable separation between Christian fellowship and the world; hoping to bring harmony between the two is not an option. At the same time, condescending self-righteousness against the world is also not an option. It is only because of Christ, who came despite knowing the hatred and mockery He would face, and the love He has for us that we are saved! Christian fellowship comes from God, lies under the authority of God, and lives unto the glory of God. Guard your Christian fellowship and savour Christ and the gospel! Know that you are from God and take up your cross and follow Him in holiness!