

“ANYONE WHO GOES TOO FAR” – A Study of 2 John 8-9 (part 1 of 4)

The apostle John in his second epistle to what was most likely a local church fellowship, issues a warning to those believers in 2 John 8-9, where we read this –

“Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.”

The above verses are linked, so that the potential loss of reward is in view and NOT the loss of salvation. Regarding reward, John’s desire for himself and these fellow believers was receiving a full reward; being concerned that something could cause them to fall short of that fullness, detailed in v9. The inherent danger is described as “going too far,” resulting in a departure from the teaching of Christ.

How are we to interpret this warning? Does the departure from the teaching of Christ consist of a complete abandonment into apostasy? Or, does it imply a scenario where a Christian goes off on a tangential pursuit which is not in harmony with God’s will for their personal life; or more generally, beyond the boundaries of New Testament sound doctrine? The latter scenario is preferable, supported by the expression “does not have God.” The key to determining the apostle’s intent centers around the word “abide” (meno); which appears frequently throughout John’s writings, with the most prominent example occurring in John 15:1-8.

If our interpretation of v9 is to be governed by v8, here is how this simple interaction can be clearly understood: “Going too far” creates the potential danger of not receiving a full reward. How can we avoid such a danger? By abiding (remaining/continuing) in the teaching of Christ. That expression: “the teaching of Christ,” can be viewed in one of two ways. It can refer to the teaching *about* Christ or the teaching which our Savior Himself provided to His disciples while here on earth. My preference would be to view it as both/and, rather than either/or. Any pursuit outside of that realm of sound doctrine does not have its source in God and does not have God’s approval/blessing and will not be rewarded. This can be viewed as a loss of reward and/or failing to receive a full reward, since a pursuit in harmony with the teaching Christ would have avoided one and overcome the other.

More on this in our next segment, as we consider the significance of John 15:1-8 and its relationship to 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, as well as the example of Peter, who ever so briefly, went off on such a tangential pursuit, in what seemed to be an abandonment of the ministry to which he had been called of God.