

What Does It Mean to “Preach the Cross”?

One writer has referred to the instrument of Jesus’ death as “The Polished Mahogany Cross” (Bill Love, *The Core Gospel*, p. vii). He intended by this to emphasize that our generation does not see the cross as an instrument of torture as did the first century where it was the common instrument of Roman punishment for criminals. Consequently, that writer and others have concluded that our generation has failed to place the cross in its proper place in God’s grace, ignoring or unwittingly omitting the cross as an expression of God’s grace and the “drawing power” (John 12:32) of God unto salvation. In its place, we are accused, we have put an emphasis on doctrine, splitting the Bible into bits and pieces, placing theology and its study on a higher plane than that of the “core gospel.” The accusation is untrue and unfounded.

This “core gospel” has been the subject of much discussion. A British theologian of the Church of England by the name of C. H. Dodd (1930’s) has written extensively on the theory (an avowed modernist, he denied the inspiration of the Bible). His views have been carried into the mainstream of Protestant religious thought and, to one extent or another, into the thinking of some brethren. Carl Ketcherside, for one, accepted his definition of a “core gospel” and changed his religious views to accommodate it. Ketcherside was con-

sidered a maverick in his early preaching and writing days but lived long enough to see his views gain popularity. In Love's book, this "core gospel" achieves a status of scholarship (in some circles).

Background of "Core Gospel" Concept

"Dodd maintained that the original disciples who heard Jesus speak and who later became disciples did so with the anticipation of an immediate return of Jesus while they lived. When Jesus did not immediately return, they began to memorize the sayings of Jesus and formed a primitive catechism to preserve these sayings (he did not believe in plenary inspiration). Later disciples, including Luke, Paul and Peter, incorporated these catechisms into their writings as they attempted to explain within doctrinal and moral instructions why Jesus delayed His coming. To Dodd, these original sayings of Jesus (which had salvation as their theme) were buried in the volume of New Testament writings but he has determined which they are and these form an original 'kerygma' or evangel (the original gospel that has salvation as its theme). One should not try to *teach* this gospel but *kerussein* (proclaim, preach it). The doctrinal and moral instruction (law, if you will) should be taught (*didaskein*), not preached. From this, one can see clearly the distinction that Dodd has made between gospel and doctrine" (Tom Roberts, *Neo-Calvinism in the Church of Christ*, p. 48). "The significant features of Dodd's theory which have been described in their developmental sequence are:

1. In the earliest church a distinct activity called preaching was practiced.
2. Preaching had a particular content, the kerygma, which was the earliest missionary message of the church.

3. Fragments of this earliest message are discernible in the written record, Scripture.
4. Teaching is a second, distinct activity of the early church.
5. The content of teaching is primarily ethical instruction and exhortation. Its form is derived from Jewish antecedents.
6. The practice and content of teaching are the product of the evolutionary development of the earliest church as it awaited the second coming of Jesus" (*Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church*, Robert C. Worley, pp. 22, 23)." (ibid. p. 51).

"Following the various suggestions of German form critics, Dodd pieced together fragments from the various books and chapters of the Pauline writings to form what he called the kerygma....In a modification of Dodd's *original proposal that the kerygma consisted of seven items*, Hunter and Craig proposed a kerygma with three points. *They were not in agreement on the three points*. Craig, in addition, maintained that considerable freedom was exercised by the early preachers in following the formula....Filson....maintained (he) could find five facts...Glasson, like Filson, has argued for a kerygma with *five facts, not identical* with Filson's....Gartner suggested a seven-point kerygma with significant modification of Dodd's original seven points" (ibid. p. 52).

"Dodd's seven points were: The prophecies are fulfilled – a new age inaugurated by the coming of Christ; Jesus born of seed of David; died according to the scriptures; was buried; rose on the third day; exalted at God's right hand; will come again' (*The Apostolic Preaching*, p 17)." (ibid, p. 52).

Redefinition of “Gospel” and “Doctrine”

To Establish “Core Gospel” Carl Ketcherside advocated that the “core gospel” “consisted of the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, coronation and glorification of Jesus’ (*Mission Messenger*, Dec., 1972, p. 180)” (ibid, p. 53). He also said that “The gospel was proclaimed as fully and completely on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus as it ever has been, and nothing written later was added to it” (ibid, p. 53). “Not one apostolic letter is a part of the gospel of Christ...the Roman letter was not a part of the gospel...the letter to the Galatians was not a part of the gospel” (ibid, p. 53). “The implications of all this to unity and fellowship are weighty. It means that the gospel itself, not our doctrinal interpretations, is the basis of our being one in Christ and in fellowship with each other. That is, when one believes in Jesus and obeys him in baptism, he is our brother and in the fellowship ... That fellowship is strengthened and made joyful by doctrine, but it is the gospel and not doctrine that determines the fellowship...” (Leroy Garrett, “The Word Abused,” *Restoration Review*, Vol. XVII, No. 3, pp. 42-46), (ibid, pp. 54-55). “Everywhere Paul went he established churches preaching the same gospel of Jesus crucified and raised. Along the way, in and out of scrapes, he wrote letters to the churches he had established. In those letters he applied the ‘word of the cross,’ exploring the implications of the core gospel for daily church problems.” (ibid. p. 39). It means that the *gospel itself, not our doctrinal instructions*, is the basis of our being one in Christ and in fellowship with each other.” (ibid, p. 59).

What the Bible Teaches About Gospel/Doctrine

1. 1 Tim. 1:8-11 (gospel includes doctrine); 2 Tim. 3:16 (doctrine includes gospel).

2. John 18:19 – Jews asked Jesus about his “teaching” (doctrine). Was it gospel?
3. Acts 5:21, 28, 42 – Disciples taught the gospel.
4. Acts 13:12 (note vs. 7, 8, 10)
5. Acts 17:3, 10, 11, 18, 19 (preaching and teaching used interchangeably).
6. Acts 20:20 – declaring and teaching the word
7. Acts 20:25 – Paul preached (kerusso) to elders
8. Rom. 1:15 – gospel preached to church at Rome
9. Rom. 6:17 – teaching the death, burial and resurrection (vs. 3ff)
10. 1 Cor. 11:26 – we preach (proclaim) by taking the Lord’s Supper
11. 2 Thes. 2:14, 15 – traditions (core gospel?) were taught
12. 2 Tim. 4:2 – preach the word with all teaching
13. Terms “the faith,” “gospel,” “truth,” “word of God,” “word of the Lord,” “doctrine,” are all used interchangeably and refer to one another: Acts 17:3-9; Col. 1:5; Eph. 1:13; Jn. 8:32; Ja. 1:18, 21; Jn. 17:17-19; Jude 3; Gal. 2:5, 14; Gal. 3:1; Phil. 1:27; Acts 13:5

Accusations Based on Faulty Redefinition

“Peter preached Christ crucified and raised by the plan and power of God for the salvation of all mankind [in Acts 2, tr]. That was the core gospel. That the nucleus of the gospel which changed the world” (Love, *The Core Gospel*, p. 32). “In other words, was the ‘word of the cross’ central in our proclamation as it is in the New Testament?” (ibid, p. 109). “From the very first something of the core gospel was missing in our Restoration preaching” (ibid. p. 152).

“When we compare the first and second generations of Restoration preachers we see a decline in mention of the core gospel from 56 to 46 percent...in the case of T. W. Brents the theme is present hardly at all” (ibid. p. 180). “This second generation preaching shows a measurable decline in both the quantity and quality of references to the cross. What the first generation considered obvious and took for granted seemed less obvious to the second generation” (ibid. p. 181).

“In this third generation we see a further decline in percentages of sermons with references to the core gospel. The rate of mention declined from 56 in the first generation to 46 in the second to 26 in the third. Even that low figure does not truly indicate the poverty of their preaching regarding the cross” (ibid, p. 207).

“All in all, the fourth generation’s sermons in the composite show further decline in mention of the core gospel, from 26% to 23%...My own judgment is that the seeds of the first generation’s church-centered ‘Reformation’ had by this time taken root, come to full maturity and were bearing abundant fruit. Long since had the focus shifted from Golgotha to Pentecost” (ibid. 239).

Someone has said, “Let your opponent define your terms and you will lose every argument.” We see the wisdom of this in our present difficulty. If “gospel” or “core gospel” is defined so as to include only seven (or five, or three, etc.) items, then fellowship with God will depend only on those things and one must preach about these things and these things only in order to preach the gospel. Preaching about any other Bible subject would not be preaching the “gospel.”

If I re-defined “money” to mean “gold” and then complained that I had no money when I have \$1 million in the bank, I would be playing fast and loose with the truth.

If I re-defined "obedience" to mean "perfect works salvation" and then complained that by preaching baptism you are guilty of believing in salvation by works, I would also be playing fast and loose with the truth.

If I re-defined "gospel" to mean only "seven core facts about Jesus" and then complain that you are not preaching the gospel when you preach about the church or morality or worship, I would be playing fast and loose with the truth.

Now make the application to the "cross." If I re-define "word of the cross" to mean only the passion and death of Jesus on Calvary and then complain that when you preach about elders, organization of the church, morality, etc., you are not preaching the "word of the cross," I am also playing fast and loose with the truth.

The real and only fair consideration is, "How does the Bible define the 'word of the cross,' and what does it mean to 'preach Christ and him crucified'?" Let the Bible define its own terms.

The Word of the Cross Includes:

- I. All the fact, commands, and promises of the gospel centered in Jesus Christ – Rom. 1:16, 17. Are only the "red letters" of the New Testament the doctrine of Christ or is all scripture included?
- II. The entire gospel system – Acts 20:20-27; 1 Cor. 1:18
 - A. Preaching all that the Bible says about the man (Jesus Christ) and the plan he gave to save souls – Mk. 16:15-16; Matt. 28:18-20; "all things I have commanded you" have Jesus at their core as much as the facts of the cross.
 - B. Preaching grace and the obedience of faith – Rom. 1:5; Rom. 16:25-26.

- C. Preaching about baptism, the church and godly living – Titus 2:11-14.
- D. Preaching about the faithful lives of Christians – Mt. 26:13; 2 Cor. 8:18.
- E. Preaching repentance and the kingdom – Mark 1:14-15
- F. Preaching that Gentiles are a part of the kingdom – Acts 15:7; opposing as false teachers those who deny it – Gal. 2:5-6.
- G. Condemning ungodly living – Gal. 2:14; 5:16-26; 1 Pet. 4:1-3.
- H. Preaching about the church since Christ and the church are sometimes used interchangeably in the scriptures – 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Acts 8:1, 3; Gal. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:9; Acts 9:5; 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2:16.
- I. Connecting the cross and its centrality to every New Testament truth. It is a sin to exclude the cross itself from any doctrine; it is sin to preach *only* the cross to the exclusion of any doctrine. Examples: Lord's supper, baptism, elders, work of the church, worship of the church, church discipline, etc.
- J. Preaching through Romans to Revelation is also a part of "gospel preaching" and "word of the cross preaching." The cross of Christ undergirds every syllable of the New Testament and Romans through Revelation is as much a part of the gospel as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- K. Preaching that is a *balance* between the story of the cross and the effect of that sacrifice in a world of sin. Without the cross, the world would be lost, the church would be useless, its work would be meaningless and our obedience would be but vanity (1 Cor. 15:19).
- L. Preaching in opposition to those who would re-define the gospel – Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9-11; Jude 3.

(For more study, see "Preaching the Cross: Agreeing with a Brother on Some Fundamentals," Larry Hafley, *Guardian of Truth*, 11/5/92.)

Proper Use of the Text and Context: The Apostle of John and “Doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9-11)

This part of *Watchman* has been devoted to a study of difficult passages (“*Solid Food*”) recognizing that some passages are said by Peter to be “*hard to understand*” (2 Pet. 3:16). We are emphasizing that difficulty is not impossibility. Just as milk is for babes, meat is for mature adults and this process of growth is analogous to spiritual maturity. We are to “*desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*” (1 Pet. 2:2). At the same time, we are to be “*no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ*” (Eph. 4:14-15). Growing up in Christ means attaining a “*measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*” (v. 13), that of a mature Christian who has gone on to “perfection.”

“Perfection,” as used by Paul here is not sinlessness nor omniscience. It is that condition of “knowledge” (2 Pet. 1:5) that is to be attained as we grow in the “*grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2:20). This “perfection” or “maturity” is that ad-

vanced stage of growth for which Paul prayed for the Colossians: “... *that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may have a work worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God*” (1:9-11). Paul and his fellow-laborers “labored fervently” that the saints at Colossae might “*stand perfect and complete in all the will of God*” (4:12). This level of spiritual maturity is the desired goal of every Christian, attainable as we make progress from milk to meat. As the Hebrew writer phrased it: “*For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*” (5:13-14). Please note the contrast between the “unskilled” who is a babe, and those of “full age” who “*by reason of use have their senses exercised.*” Stunted growth is both a physical and spiritual tragedy. With God’s help, through a dedicated and faithful study of God’s holy word, Christians may become “*perfect and complete, lacking nothing*” (Ja. 1:4). Contrast this with those who are “*ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tim. 3:7). These are those spoken of by Peter who “*untaught and unstable,*” misunderstood Paul’s writings and “*twisted [them] to their own destruction as they do also the rest of the scriptures.*”

Understanding 2 John 9-11 – “Doctrine of Christ”

Of course, Paul is not alone in teaching things “hard to be understood.” The need for spiritual maturity attaches itself to every part of the divine revelation. Specifically, our text for consideration as “*Solid Food*” is: “*Whoever transgresses and does abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.*” There has been a great deal of controversy attached to the phrase “doctrine of Christ” throughout the years

and an improper application has nurtured an illegitimate "unity in diversity" that has caused many to fellowship false doctrines of every sort and to embrace sectarians of every stripe.

Our interest lies in the proper understanding of the "doctrine of Christ." The substance of the controversy can be grasped by a letter to me from one who read material written about Romans 14. He stated:

"I have read and enjoyed your article on Romans 14. My question goes to your use of II John 9-11. Do you not think that a proper use of that scripture, contextually and exegetically, would limit our use of those verses to the Gnostic heresy which was being used in II John? In other words, doesn't that verse only apply to those who would deny that Christ came 'in the flesh?' I believe that we have tended to take that verse out of context far too much and apply in ways that it was not intended. Remember your mention of the old adage – a proof text taken out of context is a pretext. Thanks for your consideration."

A friend of his also interjected his comments in the correspondence with the following proposal:

"A. Always know enough about the who, what, where, when and why (occasion/purpose) of the text to establish the context from which it is taken.

"B. Before using a Proof Text (or Word), ask, 'Is it consistent with the context?' Beware of those who ignore this Basic Rule...A Proof Text out of Context is a Pre-text.

“C. Challenge those who use a proof text (word) to mean (or teach) something now to us today that it did not mean then (to the 1st century church). This is another way of saying that our hermeneutics must be controlled by exegesis, as opposed to eisegesis. In other words, before we apply scripture to the here and now, we must first understand what it meant there and then and limit its meaning accordingly.

“I would like to address some of your comments to (name omitted), but first would like to pose the following interpretation ground rules for your consideration. What I am calling the ABC’s of Bible Interpretation. If we agree about the ABC’s, then we may even agree about the XYZ’s!!!

“What do you think of these ABC’s?”

Consideration of 2 John 9 and Context

My response included the following excerpts:

I appreciate your comments about the material on Romans 14. I am convinced that the current misinterpretation of Romans 14 is opening the gates of apostasy by a willingness to “receive one another” (v. 1) in every kind of sinful practice. As this erroneous view becomes more popular, compromise will multiply. To date, no one has attempted to show why I am wrong, exegetically, with the material, they just insist on putting doctrinal matters in the text and having fellowship with error.

As to 2 John 9, I am convinced that the context will force us to a broader application of verses 9ff than the Gnostic heresy alone. For example, John rejoiced in the disciples *"walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father"* (v. 4). He further states that we should *"walk according to His commandments, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it"* (v. 6). While Gnosticism is one form of rejection of truth, it is not the only rejection. "Walking in truth," and "walking in the commandments" is equal to the language of John in the first epistle, where he speaks of *"walking in the light"* (1:7). But notice the context of "walking in the light" in 1 John: the *"things written"* (v. 4), *"the truth,"* (v. 8), *"I write"* (2:1), *"keep his commandments"* (v. 3), *"not keep the commandments...a liar"* (v. 4), *"keep the word"* (v. 5), *"the word which you have heard from the beginning"* (v. 7), *"I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because ye know it"* (v. 21), *"no lie is of the truth"* (v. 21), *"same anointing teaches you concerning all things"* (v. 27), *"practice righteousness"* (3:10), *"keeps his commandments"* (24), *"many false prophets"* (4:1); he who is of God *"hears us"* (the apostles) (v. 6), *"this is the commandment"* (v. 21) [please notice that this use of "commandment" applies to loving the brethren, not identifying Gnostics], *"keep his commandments"* (5:2), *"this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments"* (v. 3), *"witness of God"* (v. 9), *"testimony"* (v. 10, 11), *"these things I have written"* (v. 13), *"the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we may know him who is true"* (v. 20).

While some of these verses refer to Gnosticism, many are broader and refer to truth in general, commandments, what the apostles have written. Limiting these verses to a refutation of Gnosticism only would be to limit the verses to less than the context.

There is also a parallel expression with 2 John 9, “the doctrine of Christ,” located in Acts 2:42, “the apostles’ doctrine.” If the doctrine of Christ means the “doctrine about Christ,” why would not the “apostles’ doctrine” mean the “doctrine about the apostles?” **In fact, the doctrine of Christ is the doctrine which Christ taught, just as the apostles’ doctrine is the doctrine the apostles taught.**

Ron Halbrook preached an excellent lesson on the use of “walking in the light” and what it means at Baytown, TX in a series of lectureships a few years ago. This lectureship (which dealt with Romans 14 and fellowship) was audio and video taped and the tapes are free for the asking from the Pruett St. church, Baytown, TX 77520 (ph. 409/422-5926). Ron’s study alone is worth listening to the entire set. Brother Halbrook has also authored “*The Doctrine of Christ and the Unity of the Saints*” which is available from Truth Bookstore (1-800-428-0121).

Historically, the ones who have limited the use of 2 John 9-11 to Gnosticism alone have been those who wish to broaden fellowship with various unscriptural practices and have taken this approach to 2 John. 9 to isolate it from being used to combat other errors. Notice that I am not accusing you of making this argument, but only to give the historical reference. Some who were willing to fellowship instrumental music, denominational creeds like Calvinism, etc., rejected 2 John 9 as having any relevance due to a supposed limitation to the Gnostic philosophy. However, a careful study of the text and context will show that it has to do with any differences from revealed truth: that which is written by the apostles.

Similar arguments were made toward Galatians 1:6-9, attempting to limit this only to fighting the Judaistic gospel, “*which is not the gospel of Christ.*” However, a careful analysis of the entire letter of

Galatians will likewise reveal a broader use of "gospel" than simply a denial of the "law/gospel" of the Judaizing teachers. For example, the word "gospel" as used in chapters 1 and 2 is expanded to include "hearing of faith" (3:2, 5), and "scripture" (v. 8), "covenant" (v. 15ff), "walk in the spirit" (5:16), being "led by the spirit" (v. 18) [would this be equal to "walking in the light?], "live in the spirit, walk in the spirit" (v. 25 – which addresses lusts of the flesh vs. fruit of the spirit, not the Judaizers alone), "law of Christ" (6:2), "taught in the word" (v. 5). "walk according to this rule" (v. 16). Admittedly, some phrases address the Judaizers' error, but the use of "truth" is much broader than that alone.

(Name omitted), I hope this will help to see the proper use of 2 John 9-11 is to apply it to any and every departure of that which our Lord taught through the word of God. While Gnosticism and Judaism were two specific departures of the faith among the first century brethren, the Bible teaches us to fight every departure and to "contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). My question would be, "Which false doctrine can we fellowship?" If we cannot use 2 John 9 or Galatians 1:6-9 to fight error, which verses would you use? If the compromise view of Romans 14 is coupled with the restrictive use of 2 John 9 and Galatians 1, how will Christians ever defend the truth against apostasy? The end result will be a bedding down with sin (which is taking place in many areas) and the inability to keep ourselves pure.

Consideration of "ABC Rules"

As for your ABC's of interpretation ground rules, I find them inadequate for every situation of Bible study. It is certainly true that our study should be controlled by exegesis as opposed to eisegesis. However, it is extremely difficult to accept your 3 rules as exhaustive of

hermeneutical principles. While the Bible can certainly be understood (Eph. 3:4; 5:17, etc), I do not wish to limit myself by rules that do not permit every application of scripture.

For example: A principle of truth, though spoken directly toward a given situation when written, may be a principle that will apply to many different situations in application in future days – even to the end of time. We understand that the New Testament was written to the individuals and churches in the first century, but it was also written for us, “to the end of the ages” (Mt. 28:18-20). While it is true that the ancient words of scripture must retain their meaning in modern language (to have an accurate translation), there were situations in the first century that cannot be duplicated today. Thus, the words (though they mean the same today as when first written) having to do with spiritual gifts cannot apply today. Can one prophesy today? Can one speak in tongues today? Can one work miracles today? While we might agree that this was written for use of spiritual gifts before “the faith” was completely written, the principle of “God is not the author of confusion” would apply today as readily as it did during the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:33). Would I be guilty of taking that out of context if I applied it to a disorderly assembly today? Must things be done “decently and in order” (v. 40) only during the exercise of spiritual gifts? If it is not a misapplication of scripture to apply verses 33 and 40 (and others) to modern assemblies, why is it wrong to apply the principles of 2 John 9-11 to any theory that goes beyond the doctrine of Christ?

In the study of Romans 14, for example, the cases under consideration (eating meats and observing days), though taken in context, do not adequately extend the application to situations that are applicable today, if we limit the principles to the meats and days of the first century. However, I think both of us would agree that the principles

of truth taught in Romans 14 may be applied to similar and parallel situations today. Must I be of Jewish origin to apply the principles of "eating meats" or "not eating meats" to modern problems? If not, why must one be a Gnostic before violating 2 John 9-11?

Thus, if we maintain that Gnosticism and only Gnosticism is the purview of 2 John 9-11 and that these principles cannot apply to any *similar* and *parallel* situations, we unduly limit the application of divine scripture. Likewise, if we limit the use of Galatians 1:6-9 to Judaismism.

Other considerations:

- Might one apply the principle of James 2:1-4 to the issue of race rather than economics?
- Might we take Acts 15:24 ("to whom we gave no such commandment") to any unauthorized practice: instrumental music, Christmas, Easter?
- Would you apply Luke 7:29-30 (written to condemn the Pharisees and lawyers) to Baptists today? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- Did Jesus misapply Isaiah 29:13 when he applied it to unwashed hands in Mt. 15:4-6?
- Did Jesus misapply Genesis 2:24 when he used it to condemn divorce in Matthew 19:3-6 (though divorce is not mentioned in Genesis 2:24)?

I could go on with much more, but I hope you get the point. If I agreed to abide by your rules, I would be tying my hands regarding proper use of scripture. This would allow you an undue advantage if, indeed, you seek to limit 2 John 9-11 and/or Galatians 1:6-9 to first century error without allowing the principle to apply to error today.

The truth of the matter is that the principle of truth that condemns Gnosticism and Judaism also condemns “*one who practices lawlessness*” (1 Jn. 3:4) today. If yes, why? If no, why not?

Conclusion

Scripture is understandable. But it may also be twisted by those unwilling or unable to divorce themselves from sectarian views and see the truth in its purity. Our attitude toward scripture should be that of Paul who commended the elders of Ephesus to “*God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified*” (Acts 20:32).

We should grow in our ability to “*rightly divide the word*” as we mature spiritually (2 Tim. 2:15). This will help us to “*put away childish thoughts*” (1 Cor. 13:11) and to grow to “*perfection*.”

Finally, scripture must be reconciled with God’s character. Any time that I interpret a passage so as to include any kind of fellowship with sin, I have obviously missed the mark. “*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*” (1 Jn. 1:5); “*no lie is of the truth*” (2:21). To twist 2 John 9 or any other passage of scripture so as to extend the hand of fellowship to error is to violate both text and context.

This is a sample of the material contained in
*Solid Food: Delving into the Meat of the Word
on Various Topics*
by Tom M. Roberts

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