

## **POSTCARDS: II John II John**

Clay City Christian Church is a part of a worldwide fellowship known as the Independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. This group comprises over 1 million members in some 6000 congregations in North America. Worldwide, this fellowship is represented in 40 countries with a total of over 1.5 million members in over 7500 congregations.

On a voluntary basis, we support about 30 Bible Colleges in this country, scores of church camps, numerous children's homes and campus ministries and a variety of mission works in this country and abroad.

We also have a few publishing houses including College Press in Joplin Missouri and Standard Publishing Company in Cincinnati, OH. Standard Publishing produces the Sunday School literature that we use and also The Lookout and Christian Standard magazines that we make available each week here at the church.

Our movement began to take shape in early 19<sup>th</sup> Century America when a few men began to think outside the box of religion as they knew it. All they had ever observed were denominations and denominationalism. They thought it was a shame that Christians who went to one church might not be considered Christians in another. They thought it was just wrong that members of one congregation might not be permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper in a congregation of a different denomination.

So, independent of one another and in separate parts of this young nation, these men began to dream a dream of just being Christians with no denominational name besides. They figured that if they could just be Christians, they ought to be able to fellowship with other Christians who were a part of any denomination.

So, apart from any contact or input from one another, these men began to simply call themselves "Christians". Someone came up with a slogan: "We are not the only Christians but we are Christian only."

To simply be Christians, they figured that they should use the Bible as the only guide for their lives and for their churches. One of them came up with a slogan that said, "The Bible only makes Christians only." Another saying that ensued was, "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the divine."

Given the fact that the Bible was going to be the only guide for their lives individually and congregationally, it became important to decide what to do about things that the Bible does not address. Another saying emerged: "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent."

In the early years of our movement, the churches experienced dramatic growth. This fresh, non-denominational attitude resonated with the pioneer spirit of the times and many people were drawn to the cause.

Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, major theological changes that began in Europe, came to our shores. These changes created seismic tremors in our movement.

The theological change was a teaching that the Bible was not reliable. Some theologians said that the Bible contained the Word of God but that it was not the Word of God. By that, they meant that at different places in the Bible, people could find God's truth but not all of it was God's truth.

Within our fellowship of churches, leaders became concerned. If some human can stand in judgment over the Bible and declare that parts of it are not inspired, not accurate and not God's Word, then we are left without a reliable standard for our lives, individually and congregationally.

So people rose to defend the Scriptures. In the process, they began to see those who were undermining the authority of the Bible as opponents of the truth. They were no longer regarded as brothers in Christ, they were regarded as enemies.

With that, we began to draw lines around our fellowship. Those inside the line were brothers and sisters and those outside the line were not.

Over time, the line got darker and the circle got smaller – until, eventually, instead of declaring that we were not the only Christians but Christians only, we began to act as if we were Christians only and the only Christians. Members of churches of different denominations sensed this and felt offended. And some pushed back and accused us of being exclusive and not very Christlike. Far from being not the only Christians but Christians only, some of them wondered if we were Christians at all since we seemed so judgmental.

In many of our churches, the minister was discouraged from participating in ministerial alliances because that meant associating with people outside our small circle. Some would have said that these ministers of other churches were unsaved and that we should have no fellowship with them.

More recently, many people have begun to moderate those extreme views. But that has left some to wonder if there are any appropriate limits to our fellowship as Christians. Should we just erase all the lines and regard everybody as a child of God and a brother in Christ?

The little letter of II John was written to answer that very question. And we are going to look at that letter this morning.

Our theme for 2009 is "Little Is Much". For the next couple of weeks, I want us to look at a few of the little letters in the New Testament. These letters are so short that Church Swindoll has called them postcards. And the first of these postcards I want us to consider is II John.

It is a brief letter, only 13 verses long. So let's begin by reading it.

*The elder,*

*To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—<sup>2</sup> because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever:*

*<sup>3</sup> Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.*

*<sup>4</sup> It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. <sup>5</sup> And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. <sup>6</sup> And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.*

*<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. <sup>9</sup> Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. <sup>11</sup> Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.*

*<sup>12</sup> I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.*

*<sup>13</sup> The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.*

So, again, the question: Are there are any appropriate limits to our fellowship as Christians? John would seem to say there are.

John addressed his postcard to the chosen lady and her children and he closes the postcard by attaching the greetings of the children of her chosen sister. Some Biblical scholars have wondered if this letter was written to one specific woman and her children. But most students of the Bible believe that the chosen lady is a church and her children are the members of that church. They would also understand that John is including greetings from the members of the sister church of which he is a part. I agree with that understanding of the postcard.

So it is a letter written by John, the apostle of love, and addressed to a specific church and the members of that church.

In this little letter, John affirms his love for that church and her members. He also declares that it gives him great joy to know that some of the members of that church are still living loving lives as we all have been commanded to do.

But then he issues a stern warning: deceptive people have gone out into the world. He cautions that these deceivers do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Not only does John call them deceivers, he says they are antichrist.

Have you ever heard someone try to identify the antichrist? I have heard people say that the antichrist was Julius Caesar, Adolph Hitler, Ronald Reagan, Henry Kissinger and a whole host of other figures. Someone even suggested that Barney the purple dinosaur was the antichrist!

John leaves no doubt that there is not one single antichrist but there are many and you can tell who they are by one litmus test: they deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. If you ever run across anyone who says that Jesus was not the Christ, that is that he was not God's promised anointed one, and that he was not a historical figure, mark it down, that person is antichrist. And John says that people like this are both deceptive and dangerous.

One of the dangers of which John warns us is that these antichrist teachers can lead us astray with their false doctrine and they can actually cause us to lose our reward. I know there are those who believe that once a person has been saved, he can never lose his salvation but apparently no one told John that. He believed it is possible for someone who has been saved to forfeit his salvation. And that happens when a person ceases to believe that Jesus is God's son who came in the flesh as an actual person.

John says that such people who go beyond what Scripture teaches about Jesus, do not have God. They do not have a relationship with God, God is not their Father and they are not a part of God's family.

Then John says that we are not to take them into our house or welcome them because if we do, we facilitate their evil work. Now remember, we are not talking about an individual person and his private home. As I said, I understand that John is writing to a church. He is warning them not to welcome into their church those who deny that Jesus is God's son who came in the flesh and lived as a human being on earth. If we accept them as members of the church and allow them to teach their false doctrine, we aid and abet their ungodly work.

So, to summarize, the church is to demonstrate fellowship but we are also to be discerning and discriminating in our fellowship. Let me see if I can give you a specific example of what I believe John was teaching.

When we lived in Minneapolis, there was a family who had begun attending our church with whom Sandy and I hit it off right away. Sandy and the wife got to be very good friends and the husband and I became close. We socialized in each other's homes and the husband and I even bought season tickets together to the University of Minnesota Gopher football games.

It was at one of those games that Randy asked me about becoming a member of the church. He said he really enjoyed the activities of the church. He had a lot of respect for the members of the church. He wanted to be more involved and he would like to become a member of the church.

I explained to him about the importance of baptism and that his immersion would identify him with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. I told him that the Bible

teaches that if we are buried with Jesus in baptism, we will certainly be raised with him to heaven.

Randy said he was quite willing to be baptized. He had no problem with that. "But," he said. "Do I have to believe that Jesus came back to life in order for me to be a member of that church?" I paused for a moment and said, "Yes, Randy, you do. If you do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead, there is no reason to believe that he is God in the flesh. And if you do not believe Jesus is God in the flesh, we cannot receive you into membership in the church."

Randy regretfully admitted that he did not believe Jesus was anything other than a really good man who taught some really profound truths. He did not believe Jesus was God in the flesh and so he did not believe that he rose from the dead.

Sometime after that, Randy and his family moved away and I've lost all touch with them. I don't know if Randy ever came to believe that Jesus is the Christ, that he is God who came in the flesh. I often pray that he did grow to believe the truth about Jesus.

My appeal to Clay City Christian Church is this: let's not draw dark circles any smaller than the apostles did. Anyone who knows that Jesus Christ is a historical person and that he is God in human flesh is my brother in Christ. I ought not to stand in judgment over people with whom I disagree over lesser truths.

Those who do not believe this truth are still to be treated with love and with respect in hopes that we may be able to lead them to know and to accept the truth about Jesus.

Furthermore, any who have identified with his death burial and resurrection through the Biblical institution of baptism are to be welcomed into the family of the church.

But what about those who know Jesus is God's son but who have not identified with his death, burial and resurrection? I choose to regard them as brothers and sisters even though they are not members of this congregation and I hope they will teach me what I have not yet learned and that I can have opportunity to teach them what they have not yet learned.

When we regard one another in this way, we can truly sing, "What a fellowship, What a joy divine," as together we are "Leaning on the everlasting arms" of Jesus.

**INVITATION:**       #575 – *"Leaning On The Everlasting Arms"*