

ye need not that any man teach you

by William MacDonald

Transcript

“...ye need not that any man teach you.” (1 John 2:27)

At first glance this verse poses problems. If we don't need anyone to teach us, why did the risen Lord give teachers to build up the saints for the work of ministering (Eph. 4:11, 12)?

In order to understand John's meaning, it helps to know the background of his letter. At the time he wrote, the church was being plagued by false teachers known as Gnostics. These heretics had once professed to be sincere believers in the Lord Jesus and had been in the fellowship of local assemblies. But then they had left to push their false views concerning the humanity and deity of Christ.

They professed to have superior knowledge, hence the name Gnostic, from the Greek word gnosis—“to know.” They probably said something like this to the Christians: “What you have is good, but we have additional truth. We can take you beyond the simple teachings and initiate you into new and deeper mysteries. If you are going to be full-grown and fulfilled, you need our teachings.”

But John warns the Christians that it is all a hoax. They don't need any of these imposters to teach them. They have the Holy Spirit. They have the Word of Truth. And they have God-ordained teachers. The Holy Spirit enables them to discern between truth and error. The Christian faith has been once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), and anything that claims to be in addition to it is fraudulent. Christian teachers are needed to explain and apply the Scriptures, but they must never transgress by going beyond the Scriptures.

John would be the last one to deny the need for teachers in the Church. He himself was a teacher par excellence. But he would be the first one to insist that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate authority, and that He leads His people into all truth through the pages of Holy Writ. All teaching must be tested by the Bible. If it professes to be in addition to the Bible, if it claims equal authority with the Bible, or if it does not agree with the Bible, then it must be rejected.

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