

Watch Out For Deceivers

Focal Verses • 2 John 1:1–13

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will RESEARCH John's caution to beware of those who do not abide in Christ's teachings, REFLECT on the emotional response to teachings that are contrary to what we have been previously taught, and TESTIFY that walking in Jesus' commandment to love protects the faith community from deceivers and corruption.

In Focus

Michelle was secretly excited to see a new face in church Sunday. He was tall and handsome and wore a very nice Italian suit. She hoped that somehow they would get a chance to meet, and they did. Roger was an educated and well-spoken businessman. During their conversation, she realized they had a lot in common, including growing up in the same hometown. He suggested they get together for dinner later in the week. Michelle couldn't resist a man who seemed to have it all together and shared her love for the Lord. Maybe she had finally found the one, but she didn't want to get ahead of herself.

Once they sat down for dinner, he began to tell Michelle how he believed in Jesus as a concept and how absurd it was to believe that Jesus actually existed. He went on further to say that the Bible was an outdated book with a few timeless truths, and we needed to be aware of its limits. Michelle couldn't believe what she was hearing. It seemed that the one thing Roger didn't have together was his beliefs. She tried to speak the truth in love to him, but he just responded with arrogance. She definitely didn't want a second date.

Why is it important to speak the truth in love?

Keep in Mind

"Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (2 John 1:8, KJV).

KJV

2 John 1:1–13

- 1 The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;
- 2 For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.
- 3 Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.
- 4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.
- 5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.
- 6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.
- 7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.
- 8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.
- 9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

Watch Out For Deceivers

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

12 Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

13 The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.

NLT

2 John 1:1–13

1 This letter is from John, the elder. I am writing to the chosen lady and to her children, whom I love in the truth—as does everyone else who knows the truth—

2 because the truth lives in us and will be with us forever.

3 Grace, mercy, and peace, which come from God the Father and from Jesus Christ— the Son of the Father—will continue to be with us who live in truth and love.

4 How happy I was to meet some of your children and find them living according to the truth, just as the Father commanded.

5 I am writing to remind you, dear friends, that we should love one another. This is not a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning.

6 Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning.

7 I say this because many deceivers have gone out into the world. They deny that Jesus Christ came in a real body. Such a person is a deceiver and an antichrist.

8 Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked so hard to achieve. Be diligent so that you receive your full reward.

9 Anyone who wanders away from this teaching has no relationship with God. But anyone who remains in the teaching of Christ has a relationship with both the Father and the Son.

10 If anyone comes to your meeting and does not teach the truth about Christ, don't invite that person into your home or give any kind of encouragement.

11 Anyone who encourages such people becomes a partner in their evil work.

12 I have much more to say to you, but I don't want to do it with paper and ink. For I hope to visit you soon and talk with you face to face. Then our joy will be complete.

13 Greetings from the children of your sister, chosen by God.

The People, Places, and Times

Elect Lady. Many scholars believe the term “elect lady” refers to a Christian matron named Lady Electa (a Greek name meaning “chosen”). This matron lived somewhere in Asia Minor, where the Johannine churches were. It is also possible that this is the title John used to address the church itself, with the children being the church members. One reason for writing this letter was to warn this cherished lady (vv. 1–2) against deceitful teachers. She apparently hosted traveling preachers or maybe even church meetings in her home (v. 10), similar to Nympha in Laodicea (Colossians 4:15). John encouraged her and cautioned against erroneous doctrine. He proposed that she not support anyone who teaches less than the full deity and humanity of Christ.

Elder. The New Testament church's development of the office of elders originated in Jewish and Old Testament traditions. The term “elder” is an expression that could indicate that John held the office of presbyter in a house church. The term was also used as a reminder of the respect due to elders in the

Watch Out For Deceivers

community. In the ancient world, an elder exercised leadership and judicial functions in both religious and secular spheres. The title of the elder was given to someone by virtue of position in the family, clan, and tribe or by reason of personality, prowess, influence, or through a process of appointment and ordination.

Background

In 2 John, the aging apostle bolstered, warned, and encouraged. He talked about deceptive influences that had traveled through the area at the expense of the church's material and spiritual health. In the early church days, not everybody believed Jesus was fully human and divine. Some only proclaimed His divinity, while others only His humanity. In 2 John, the issue lay with those who did not profess Jesus to be fully human (such as the docetists who thought Jesus' physical form was an apparition of God). John's second epistle battled this ungodly perspective and the wicked behavior that stemmed from its teaching. The apostle encouraged true believers to keep their faith. He warned followers to exclude dissidents from fellowship so as not to be accused of sharing in their diabolical work.

John's Christology and ethics represent a challenging, affirming, and crucial commandment for believers. The message emphasizes that those with the wrong teaching do not belong to God. He reiterated God's commandment of love and the necessity of walking in love and truth. He gingerly reminded the congregation of his desire to visit them soon. His message was not written in a stern, threatening, supervisory voice, yet was concise and powerful. To obscure the truth, practice erroneous doctrine, and partner with deceitful instructors violates the fundamental principles of the Gospel. This principle does not originate with the Apostle John; it is traceable to an idea Jesus established (John 3:20–21).

At-A-Glance

1. Walk in Truth (2 John 1–3)
2. Walk in Love (vv. 4–6)
3. Walk in Obedience (vv. 7–13)

In Depth

1. Walk in Truth (2 John 1:1–3)

1. Walk in Truth (2 John 1:1–3) The truth John refers to contains three components. First, the truth acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, fully human and fully divine. Second, John's truth also implies that Jesus, who is the one true God, came in the flesh so that we can know God. Third, acknowledging these truths means believers can, through Him, attain eternal life (cf. 1 John 5:20). Understanding that Christ is both God and human is of great importance to the author. Believers need to know this truth and remain in it. Holding on to this understanding of who Christ is allows us to abide in the Son of God and not be taken away from Him by heretical teachings. False prophets are easily identified because one of their major Christological mistakes is the renunciation of Christ's humanity and the insinuation that He is not the Messiah.

2. Walk in Love (2 John 1:4–6)

The love described in this epistle is not the love portrayed in cinema. It is unconditional love that nullifies selfishness and epitomizes genuine concern for others. We cannot mimic God's love without the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit. John understands that love is a powerful motivation. Our experiences often fashion our capacity to love. John writes declarations about God's loving character because he experienced His love firsthand. He called himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20). All the Gospel writers communicate Jesus' love, yet it is more prominent in John's literature. John was sensitive to the words and actions of Jesus, which illustrated how the One who is loved showed love for others. Christians must love.

Watch Out For Deceivers

How can remembering Jesus' sacrifice for us help us to love one another more fully?

3. Walk in Obedience (2 John 1:7–13)

False teachers do not walk in obedience to God's truth. Moral irresponsibility, acceptance of sin, and disregard for the spiritual, mental, and emotional health of others are common outcomes of false doctrine. John's letter reminds Christians to live ethically, compassionately, and discerningly. To deny the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ is heresy. The apostle warns faithful believers to forfeit all association with false teachers. Keeping company with false teachers allows them to propagate their doctrine and can signify our approval of what they do. We should not be disrespectful or condemn hospitality toward unbelievers. However, fellowship with false teachers is a serious matter to God. This letter serves as a warning to cherish sound doctrinal truth. To identify an imposter is to know the truth. Meditating on God's Word opens our spiritual eyes to learning the truth.

Search the Scriptures

1. What is the meaning of love (2 John 6)?
2. What are the consequences of wandering from the truth (vv. 9–11)?

Discuss the Meaning

Chronic exposure to deception alters our understanding and leads to sinful actions. Is it safe to conclude that knowing the truth about Jesus helps us live obedient and victorious lives?

Liberating Lesson

Fueled by deception and greed, scandals have crushed the American people's perception of their nation's stability. Financial crises caused many to lose their livelihood, violence—their sense of security, and hatred—self-esteem and dignity. Lives were ruined, and many never recovered economically, physically, or emotionally. Believing a lie is dangerous and costly. Christ's teaching is in direct opposition to the deception and selfishness that are rampant in society. Jesus commands that we live in love and honesty. Anyone who claims devotion to Christ must live by these directives.

Application for Activation

Remaining faithful to Jesus' teaching requires tenacity and a commitment to studying God's Word. It also means obeying His commandments. Through our testimonies and sharing the Good News of the Gospel, we can help others who do not know the truth. Decide to share your testimony about how God transformed your life!

More Light on the Text

2 John 1:1–13, KJV

The important themes of belief, obedience, and love treated in John's first letter are also central to his second and third letters. John's second letter contains this main message. John manifests concern for the inner life of the church and for the doctrinal danger that threatens it externally. He urges his readers to be watchful and walk in the truth.

1 The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; 2 For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever. 3 Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Watch Out For Deceivers

John begins this letter with the common introductory greeting of an epistle. He addresses himself as the elder. The recipient is the elect lady. This woman could have been the host or leader of a particular Christian church. John declares his love for her and “her children.” This love is qualified by being in the truth. Whether these are her biological children or children in the Lord is unclear. He then states that this love is not particular to him but universal to all who know the truth. This love is motivated by the truth that dwells in all who know it. John here gives personal qualities to “the truth,” perhaps as a way to refer to Jesus Christ, who described Himself as “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). John says this “truth” will be with us forever. It is an eternal truth that lives with them. It is more than just objective facts; it is living, breathing truth. John concludes his introductory greeting with the standard well wishes of grace, mercy, and peace. What distinguishes him from other New Testament writers is that he includes himself in the well-wishes. He says, “grace, mercy, and peace ... will continue to be with us”—the ones who know the truth (2 John 1:3, NLT). This grace, mercy, and peace are not just from John and do not rest in his mere human words; they come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

Characteristically as a shepherd, John’s heart is highly elated at the consistent Christian life of congregation members to whom he writes. “Walking” here is from the Greek word *peripateo* (peh-ree-pah-TEH-oh), which literally means “to walk around.” It is figuratively used to signify the habits of the individual life. The use of the word “truth” (*aletheia*, ah-LAY-thay-ah) implies its doctrinal and ethical denotations. To walk in the truth involves belief and behavior. Walking in the truth conveys the imagery of a path that one walks on and keeps on course without deviating. The tense of the word indicates a perpetual pattern of healthy spiritual life. The truth that John talks about did not originate with humankind, not even with the apostles themselves, who originally received it. The truth originated in divine revelation, and so is the command (Gk. *entole*, en-tow-LAY) to obey it. Indeed, in John’s epistle, both the truth and the commandments are synonymous (cf. vv. 5–6).

5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we heard from the beginning, that we love one another.

John proceeds from commendation to exhortation, based on personal request (Gk. *erotao*, eh-roh-TAH-oh, “to ask,” “beg,” “appeal,” or “entreat”). The commandment he affirms and urges on his readers is not new; it is as old as the Gospel (cf. John 13:34–35) or the time of their hearing and receiving of the same. Here, the command to believe is added to the command to love. Believing in the full humanity and divinity of Christ and His redemptive mission and demonstrating brotherly love is proof of the new birth (1 John 4:7, 5:1).

6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

John pursues the line of argument of his first letter—that Christian love is more than emotion; it is action (demonstration). Love for God and Christ is expressed in practical obedience (John 14:15, 21, 15:10; 1 John 5:2–3; cf. Romans 8:8). Jesus summarized the whole Law in the greatest commandment: love (Matthew 22:37–40). Here, John urges a continual walk in love: “that you follow love” (RSV).

In the second part of this message (vv. 7–11), John draws the church’s attention to the threat from without false teaching. He shifts focus from the true believers to the false teachers— from the wheat to the tares (Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43). John describes the heretics, identifies their error, and warns them not to be

Watch Out For Deceivers

deceived by them nor give any encouragement to them. In this Scripture passage, John commands watchfulness. He urges believers to remain loyal not only to love but also to the teaching of Christ.

7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

John affirms the appearance of false teachers in the world. He describes the false teachers as “deceivers” and “an antichrist.” The Greek word *planos* (PLAH-nohs), translated as “deceiver,” implies an impostor or corrupter, signifying wandering or leading astray. This is a repeat of his earlier warning against “deceivers” and “many antichrists” (1 John 2:18, 26, 4:1–6). An antichrist is literally someone who is against the Messiah (Gk. *anti*, (ahn-TEE) against; instead of *Christos*, (khrees-TOSE) Messiah, Anointed One). This is not a separate category of people from the deceivers, but instead, those who deceive concerning Christ’s nature are opposed to Christ and are described with both terms. The heretic’s errors are moral and doctrinal; the latter is in focus here. The Greek word *homologeō* (ho-mo-lo-GEH-oh), translated as “confess,” also means “to acknowledge,” “admit,” or “affirm.” A heretic denies the incarnation of Christ as fully man and fully deity.

8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

This is the first command of the letter: a warning to be on guard. The present imperative of the Greek word *blepo* (BLEH-poh) implies continual watchfulness to prevent disaster. John commands readers to reject the enticement of error for two reasons: to prevent the ruin of what they and John had worked for and to ensure they would be paid their reward in full.

9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

Two contradictory consequences of heterodoxy (or false doctrine) and orthodoxy are stated. The negative is first mentioned. The Greek word *parabainō* (pah-rah-BYE-no), rendered “transgresseth,” literally means “to lead before.” The false teachers were trying to change the core doctrine the Christians had received—he who fails to abide (Gk. *meno*, MEHN-oh, “to stay” or “remain”) by the doctrine cannot have Christ and His salvation. The opposite is also true. To remain continually in the doctrine (Gk. *didache*, deedah-KAY) or teaching of Christ, showing belief in and obedience of the same, is the proof of the believer’s personal relationship to both the Father and the Son.

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

John adds a practical note after warning about deceivers. He says that the church is not to receive (Gk. *lambano*, lam-BAH-noh) these deceivers into their houses. He then further says that they should not bid them “God speed” (Gk. *chairō*, KHEYE-roh). This is the word for “rejoice” or “be glad.” It became a common greeting or salutation meant to be well.

The reason behind this action toward false teachers is that by receiving them into your home or wishing them well, you partake (Gk. *koinoneō*, koy-noh-NEH-oh) in the false teachers’ evil deeds.

12 Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. 13 The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.

John concludes the letter by letting the church know that he has so much he wants to say that he would rather tell them in person. He does not want any confusion or misunderstanding concerning what he says

Watch Out For Deceivers

so that “our joy may be full.” He includes himself in the experience of having this joy full (Gk. *pleroo*, play-ROH-o). This word means “to be complete” or “filled to the brim.” John and the church’s joy will be completed once they talk face to face. John finally ends with a salutation from the children of the elect sister. These might have been the biological children of a woman related to the elect lady or fellow church converts.

Watch Out For Deceivers

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Hebrews 5–6

Proverbs 29

TUESDAY

Hebrews 7–8

Proverbs 30

WEDNESDAY

Hebrews 9–10

Proverbs 31

THURSDAY

Hebrews 11

Ecclesiastes 1

FRIDAY

Hebrews 12–13

Ecclesiastes 2

SATURDAY

James 1–5

Ecclesiastes 3

SUNDAY

1 Peter 1–5

Ecclesiastes 4