

Will Mackey
Day 1

The Letter of 2 John (An Introduction)

Before we begin our study of 2 John, I want to take a moment to thank you for entering this study with me. As we study together over the next several days, let's imagine that you and I are sitting down together at a table with a cup of coffee and our study Bibles and spending 20 minutes a day interacting with God's Word. I believe God will meet with us and teach us much about Himself and how we are to live in service to Him.

What would you do if an old friend came over to your house to visit and began to say things like:

"God has given me new insight into understanding Him and His Kingdom. This insight is an advanced understanding that most Christians don't have yet. The Bible is not completely correct. It teaches some things that are wrong about Jesus.

God did not really come as a man. Christ's spirit came on a normal man named Jesus when he was baptized. God's purpose for doing this was not to provide a sacrifice for our sins but to provide a good example to men and to lead men to a higher understanding of Himself.

God told me that I needed to tell you this and that you need to help in our ministry to spread this "higher" teaching. If you don't, you really don't love God."

What would you think?...or do? Would you be confused? Should you receive this message as if it were from the Lord? Is it possible that God would share higher insight with a select few that he didn't even share with the Apostles or record in the Bible? Is there "truth" from God that is higher and goes beyond what we believe to be His gospel message? Should you help your friend financially or give him food and shelter so he can spread his message?

Many scholars believe that John's second letter was a response to a letter written to him by a Christian lady who was facing this very situation. In that day there was an increase in the popularity of a cultish belief system called Gnosticism. Gnosticism used the figure-head of Jesus but assigned a very different identity to him than the Scriptures do. History tells us that unfortunately, many Christians strayed from "real" Christianity to this fake version.

While we don't know the exact questions she asked, we can understand some of her concerns by evaluating the answers John gave. Let's get started today by looking at some of John's responses to her. John begins by giving her 4 expressions of encouragement.

1. John encourages her by expressing his and other's love and appreciation for her.

"To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth - and not only I only, but also all who know the truth - because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever." (1, 2)

(A quick side note: some scholars believe "the chosen lady and her children" could have been a church and its members instead of a woman.) The first thing John did was to make sure that she knew that the questions she asked didn't shake John's or other believer's love and confidence in her.

In the midst of encouraging and expressing this confidence, John reminds her that there is such a thing as "truth". We can have the truth and know the truth. The truth lives in us and will be with us forever. Perhaps in her mind, this was being questioned. Maybe she was tempted to think that the truth, as the Apostles taught, wasn't so true after all...or maybe, at best, incomplete. John reaffirms to her that the truth, as she originally received it, was in fact the truth and could be relied upon.

This is not a far-fetched scenario in our own culture. There are many in our own city who claim to have advanced knowledge of God. I went to the phone book and found 7 different organized religions that use the figure-head (name) of Jesus in their beliefs but who deny what the Prophets and Apostles (Bible) say about Him. They are the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Free Masonry, Unitarianism, Bahai, and the Metropolitan Church.

Each organization teaches lies about Jesus yet at least a few are accepted by our culture as viable religions. The Truth has been handed down to us by the Prophets and the Apostles, not by these impostors. We can trust this Truth and build our lives on it.

2. John encourages her by praying a prayer of blessing for her.

"Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, who will be with us in truth and love." (3)

Grace, mercy, and peace. These were probably the very things she needed at that moment. If her faith had been challenged in a convincing way, she needed to sense God's grace, mercy, and peace.

As we will see in a few verses, one of the things the "impostor" teacher must have challenged was the identity of Jesus. John clearly says that Jesus Christ is the Father's Son and this is part of the Truth she can trust.

3. John encourages her by reminding her of spiritual successes and how God has ministered through her in the past.

"It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us." (4)

He is reminding her of the fruit God had brought in her life as she has walked in Truth. Her children (or spiritual children) embraced the faith she taught them and were walking in the Truth for themselves. Sometimes our own faith can be uplifted when we see how God's Truth has transformed another's life through us.

4. John encourages her by sharing his plans to visit her in person and address her questions more fully.

"I have much to write you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. The children of your chosen sister send their greetings." (12, 13)

John wanted to follow up this letter with a visit. The subject matter was too important. He wanted to visit so he could make sure she was once again solid in her faith and in her ability to counter the religious lies that were being told about Jesus.

So What Do We Do With This?

1. Did you notice John's approach? If we understand the context correctly, here is a person who is in a spiritual battle...perhaps becoming confused...in need of some help. She evidently had walked in faith for a while.

Notice that John's approach is one of encouragement not scolding. He didn't say, "You should know this stuff by now." *Why can't you figure this stuff out on your own?* No, his approach is one that honors the relationship and further invests in the friendship.

He approaches the problem with unconditional love. He "brags" on her a little, reminding her of her successes. He values the relationship so much that he was going to make a trip to see her (not an easy thing in those days).

I wonder if sometimes we are too quick to scold? Perhaps when we hear of a friend or family member's difficulty we rush in and just try to fix the problem instead of supporting the person? We become "problem centered" instead of "relationship centered"...we rush in and show all that is wrong instead of showing all that is right...we criticize instead of encourage...we tear down instead of build up.

Maybe a good way to help someone with a problem is to build up the person first. Then they can better work through their own problem. This may help them have the confidence or hope or faith to trust God...who wants to lead them successfully through the problem.

Maybe we are not always called to fix other people's problems but called to help create an atmosphere in which they can succeed. Certainly there are times when confrontation, rebuke, and strong instruction are necessary. John eventually did give some instruction to her. But I wonder if much of the time we would do better to build up the relationship and the person first before we offer anything else?

Is there a relationship in your life right now (spouse, child, family member, co-worker, church family...) in which you need to apply this principle today? Why don't you talk to our Father about it right now.

Have a great day. I'm praying for you today.

Pastor Will

The Letter of 2 John

Let's refresh our memories about the context of this letter. John received a letter from a respected Christian lady. It appears that this person was reaching out for help. John's letter to her was both encouraging and instructional. Based upon what he wrote, it seems that she and/or her church were being bombarded with those who claimed to be Christian but who were teaching a twisted version of the Christian gospel.

It must have been difficult for her to discern what was right and what was wrong. Sometimes those who teach wrong concepts about God can seem like they are blessed by God and spiritually successful.

An example in our day of this would be the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons). If people look at their organization simply from a professional stand point...they look good. They have nice buildings, lots of property, and are one of the fastest growing religious groups in the country. Their people are a close knit community, clean cut, and polite.

They use words like the Father, the Son, Jesus Christ, the Bible, and faith. Not until you look closer do you realize that they do not assign the same identity and meaning to these words as the Bible and Christians do. For example: the Father to them is a person who used to be a man but became a god. They believe the Father had "spiritual" sex with Mary and begot Jesus. Jesus to them is also the brother of Lucifer (the devil; also God's son). And when you define Jesus in this way the salvation he offers becomes inadequate. The lies just go on and on.

So how do you tell which "version" is right?...which to listen to and who to believe? Here is where we start today.

"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." (5)

John began to help her discern the false from the true.

1. **The first way she could discern between the two was that those who truly follow Christ...who have Him living inside them...who have embraced His Gospel and the truth of God...these people will have the capacity to love like God and will obey His command to do so.**

In other words, love is the distinguishing mark. Not just any kind of love. John uses the word **"agapao"** to define what he means by this love. This is the very word the Bible uses to describe God's love for humanity. The first century church knew that when this word was used, the writer meant God's style of love.

John believes only those who have received God's love can show this "God" type of love to others. Oh sure...even unsaved people can demonstrate acts of love to their fellowman. People can do good things for others like feed and clothe others, and even die protecting others. I agree that it can be tough to classify demonstrations of love but to see what John is talking about, we must attempt to do so.

The way to distinguish between "lower" expressions of love and "agapao" love is to look at the motive for giving it. The truth is... people demonstrate acts of love to others for all kinds of reasons. Some do things for others because they feel sorry for them...but this isn't **"agapao"** type love. Some do things for others because they feel obligated to do it because they are wealthier or healthier...but this isn't **"agapao"**.

People can be guilted into doing good things for others based on the expectations of their family or society...but that is not **"agapao"**. I heard a soldier the other day (who joined up because his grandfather and father had done so) receive praise for being a patriot...for loving his country so much that he is defending it by serving in the military. No doubt this is a good and noble thing. I too have enormous respect and praise for the men and women who serve our country in this way.

But let's look at the concept of "love" in this example. Not until we spoke in private did I understand the difference. He certainly "loves" his country but the type of love he has is called patriotism not **"agapao"**. Patriotism is great and needed but it is not as powerful as **"agapao"**.

Eventually he admitted that there are many in this country that he disrespects (he used the word "hate"). He risks his life because it is his job (his words) and because he loves his country. But he does not love all the individuals who are in his country. If individuals act

“unpatriotic” or voice political opinions different than his own, he has no use for them. This is where his concept of love falls very short of the type of love John is talking about in this letter. Agapao type love is pure, powerful, and very unnatural to fallen humanity. It reflects the nature of God (1 John 4:19-20).

When a person begins to love another person the way that God loves that person...it is unmistakable. It is higher than anything humanity can come up with. Agapao is a love that is shown to another only because agapao has been received from God (1 John 4:19).

Agapao is not blind. It sees the many faults of humanity and yet it realizes the unconditional value of the other person. It is not motivated by pity, guilt, or the expectations of others. It is motivated by an overwhelming God given desire for the other person’s highest good, regardless of who they are, their political views or the wrong they may have done.

It is not given out of selfish motive. It does not seek a reward or even a good feeling in return (1 Cor. 13:4-5). This type of love can cause a man to see past the sins of others and see the potential of what they can become. This type of love causes a man to grieve when those who have mistreated him reap what they have sown (1 Cor. 13:5b, 6a). The person who loves agapao style can set aside his emotions and keep on protecting, trusting, and hoping for God’s will to be done in the life of another (1 Cor. 13:5c, 7, 8a).

Agapao is a radical type of love and is absolutely impossible to demonstrate unless a person is filled with God’s Spirit (Galatians 5:22). This is what John was telling this lady to look for. This is how you can tell the false from the true. **Only those with Christ’s Spirit living within them can love like this.** And only those who have embraced the truth about Christ can have Christ’s Spirit.

So What Do We Do With This?

1. I think the question we should ask ourselves is obvious. Are we loving others “agapao” style? Is this type of love the distinguishing mark of our lives?

The Scriptures tell us that this type of love is the “fruit” of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). This means that when the Spirit reigns in our hearts, He produces this type of love in us. It is a by-product of His Presence and His Influence in our lives. Wherever the Spirit abides,

agapao love is produced. We are told that God is love (1John 4:8)...so then wherever He reigns His nature is manifested.

Is He reigning in your heart and life? If so, then your life will be marked by agapao type love. Are you loving this way? If I were to ask your wife...your husband...your kids...your neighbor...your co-worker what was the defining characteristic of your life...would they say agapao love?

If not...why not? This is the mark of someone who has a serious relationship with Christ. John also said, "*Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness*" (1 John 2:9). Why don't you talk with the Lord about this today?

May our Lord Jesus give us the light and the faith to submit our lives to God's Truth. May we walk in real truth and not in what we sometimes mistakenly think is the truth.

Pastor Will

The Letter of 2 John

Good morning to you ☺. It is going to be a great day. Let's recap where we are in this study.

John received a letter from a respected Christian lady. It appears that this person was reaching out for help. John's letter to her was both encouraging and instructional. Based upon what he wrote, it seems that she and/or her church was being bombarded with those who claimed to be Christian but who were teaching a twisted version of the Christian gospel.

Given the specifics of what John wrote, it must have been difficult for her to discern who was right and who was wrong. Sometimes those who teach wrong concepts about God can seem like they are blessed by God. Often those who teach things contrary to God's Word are more popular than those who don't. This "popularity" is often used to persuade others that they are blessed by God and teaching the "real" truth. Popularity creates synergism which creates more interest and so on. Cults are some of the fastest growing religious organizations in the world. But of course numerical growth does not indicate God's blessing.

John's goal in writing this short letter was to begin to help her learn how to discern the false from the true. Yesterday, John taught us the first way she could learn to discern between right and wrong. An effective way to evaluate right and wrong teaching is to look into the lives of those doing the teaching and see whether or not you witness "agapao" type love coming from them. Agapao was a God style love. Only those who love God and have His Spirit living within them can show this kind of love to another.

Here is where today's study begins. In verse 6, John gives her a second way to discern the false from the true.

"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." (6)

2. The second test to help us discern the false from the true is the test of obedience.

A doctrine of teaching that is based in Truth will produce lives that are characterized by obedience. If someone claims that his/her teaching is from the Bible but that teaching is easy on personal sin...beware of that person and his/her ideas. John says that true love for God finds its expression in obedience to his commands.

Let's look at a few more Scriptures. Jesus said, *"If you love me, you will obey what I command."* (John 14:15) *"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."* (John 14:21) *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."* (John 15:9-10)

John said this in his first letter, *"We know that we have come to know him (Jesus) if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."* (1 John 2:3-6)

Please note that when we talk about obeying Christ, we don't mean obeying the rules of a church or a pastor or a religious association. We mean obeying Jesus and His Word (Bible).

Unfortunately, there are many who would rather follow the rules of a religious organization than take the time to read and hear Christ and then prioritize their lives to obey what He said. Frankly...it is much easier...it takes less commitment...less intensity...less intentionality. Sadly, if we take this route we completely miss the truth Jesus is trying to get across to us.

Jesus' words are simple to understand. People who claim to love Him must obey Him. People who really love Christ will obey Him. If they won't or don't, they really don't love Him. They are deceiving themselves and become liars when they tell others they love Christ but refuse to obey Him. Obedience to Christ is the tell-all quality of a real follower of Christ.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS?

1. I think it is important to note there is a difference between loving the idea of loving Jesus and loving Him personally. When we love the idea of loving Jesus, we are only loving an idea. As long as it remains an idea we can control it. An idea cannot have any real expectations

upon our lives. It cannot change us. In fact, we can change the idea to fit what we need it to say at any given moment. It becomes much easier to justify disobedience or tolerate personal sin.

All we have to do is to alter our idea of Jesus a little. In our minds we can recreate Him to be more like us so He will be more acceptable of the decisions we want to make. I'm afraid many do this and don't even realize it. Many pull ideas about Jesus from both secular and Christian cultures to create their own "idea of Jesus". And when you tell them what Jesus actually said (the Bible) they look at you as if you were speaking a foreign language.

But to love the person of Jesus is another thing altogether. When we love Jesus, we are loving a person...the Son of God. We cannot control Him. He does have expectations upon our lives. We are accountable to Him. He requires obedience and will not accept a lifestyle of disobedience. He doesn't change simply because we wish Him to. He is the one who insists on change...from us.

2. The question to us today is simple. Which do we love?...our idea of Jesus or the real person of Jesus as revealed in the Scriptures? Is your life characterized by obedience or disobedience? We may be tempted to say, "It is not that simple...it is more complicated than that."

No...no it isn't.

Let's pray together.

"Jesus! Uncomplicate this for us today. Shine your light and help us see the reality of our relationship with you. Help us know the truth.

Help us fall in love with you anew and fresh today. Take away our justifications...the tricks our minds can play on us. Lead us to repentance...forgive us...cleanse us...free us from the bondage of our own ideas so we can love you in the way you want to be loved by us."
Amen!

Pastor Will

The Letter of 2 John

⁷Many 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. (7)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

John teaches a third way we can discern right doctrine from wrong doctrine. Let's outline our verse for today.

- I. Many deceivers have gone out into the world
 - A. who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh
 - B. Any such person is a deceiver
 - C. Any such person is of the antichrist

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

⁷Many deceivers...have gone out into the world. - It wasn't a religiously safe world back then and it is not one now. John warns this lady and/or her church that they cannot be naïve when it comes to those who claim to be teaching Christian truth.

The enemy of our souls has sent many deceivers out into the world. Not a "few" but "many". That means that the religious landscape of any community might have many individuals and organizations that would be classified as "deceivers". John said this to warn his readers that they must keep their eyes open and be ever discerning.

...who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh... - This is the third test. Sounds kind of odd, doesn't it? John said that these "deceivers" didn't acknowledge that Jesus had come in the flesh. In fact, this was part of what made their ministry deceptive.

They were teaching that Jesus (God's Son) didn't really become a man. They denied the Incarnation (the key idea at Christmas). This was a very common teaching of a religious line of thought back then called Gnosticism.

Gnosticism claimed that all matter was evil (this included the human body). Since they believed this, it was incomprehensible to

them that God would take on a human body and enter the human race. They thought, "He is holy, the body is evil. He would never do such a thing." So what did people, who believed this line of logic, do with the Incarnation?

They simply changed it. They began to teach that Jesus didn't actually become a man. They said that the body Jesus appeared to have was only a phantom type spiritual body. It was pure spirit and only looked like a body of flesh. For this change from the Bible's teaching, John called them deceivers and anti-christs.

Why was this so important to John? Why must the Christian message protect the truth about the Incarnation? Why is it so important that we hold onto the truth that God's Son became a human and lived among us (John 1:14)? Here are just a few of the reasons.

To believe this idea, the Gnostics:

- Denied the prophets of the OT who told us that the Messiah would be born of a virgin and become a man.
- Denied the apostles' testimony, message, and writings of those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus. As John in his first letter wrote when he was trying to correct this error, *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."* (1 John 1:1) In essence John said that Jesus' body was no phantom because he saw him, examined him, and touched him. Jesus was fully God and fully man.
- Claimed to be an advanced version of Christianity. They would say that they were the enlightened ones...the ones who had discovered more from God beyond the apostles...the ones who had gone beyond what most Christians understood...the ones who were helping Christianity develop into what God really wanted it to be. John indicated that this was arrogance (superior attitude) based upon ignorance.
- Were easy on personal sin. In fact one of their teachings used this line of thought. Since all matter is evil (our bodies included), people cannot help but to sin. Since this is true (their belief) then sinning does not affect our

spiritual condition or relationship with God. They literally invented a new doctrine of grace that gave license to sin.

They actually believed and taught that a person could do whatever he wanted and still be in good standing with God. Repentance and holy living were not necessary. Sadly enough, if you look closely at some of today's Christian teaching, you can still see traces of this thought in prominent denominations. To justify this, some teach a doctrine of grace that the Apostles did not teach. They believe their doctrine is Biblical but it really has Gnostic roots.

There are also theological reasons for preserving the truth of the Incarnation. Here are just a few.

- It was important for Jesus to become a man because humanity was created as spirit and flesh. The flesh part needed redeemed, as well. If Jesus' body were only a phantom, then God could not redeem the whole man. There would have been no need for Jesus to have been raised from the dead in bodily form. Our bodies could never be raised on the last day, either.
- It was important for Jesus to become a man because sin in the flesh needed to be dealt with. The power of Christ's salvation was so powerful that Paul could testify and instruct, *"...count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness..."* (Romans 6:11-13) and at the beginning of the same chapter, *"Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"* (Romans 6:1-2) and Paul continuing in chapter 8, *"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin; He condemned sin in the flesh..."* (Romans 8:3,NKJV). This is clearly the opposite of Gnostic thought.
- It was important for Jesus to become a man because man had sinned and needed to be responsible for it. He fully identified with the sinner by wearing our flesh, only without sin. Only the God-Man could be both a pure sacrifice and a true propitiation (look it up 😊) for our sins.

...Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. - John does not cut these guys any slack. Those that reject the message of the prophets and the teaching of the apostles (of which John was one) cannot offer anything meaningful to man or to God. These persons are deceivers (tricking men) and the antichrist (fighting against God).

These are men who like the idea of following Christ but they have rejected the truth as God has proclaimed it, thus calling Him a liar and therefore can offer no good thing to help men's souls. At the heart of such men is pure arrogance. Think of it: to reject God's way of salvation and try to change it to fit their own carnal thinking. No wonder John speaks of them with such strong language.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?

1. There are many deceivers who have gone out into our world today. I imagine never in the history of mankind have there been so many professionally developed heresies. Never before (certainly true of America) have these professional heresies enjoyed such admiration, credence, and recognition.

John, in his first letter said that we are not to , *"...believe every spirit, but should test the spirits to see whether they are from God..."* (1 John 4:1) We are responsible to test the correctness of other's words and teachings regarding their claim to represent God. We are to do this for ourselves but also to protect others from falling for the lies.

2. How much do you know about some of the most prominent professional heresies in our day...like the Mormons?...Jehovah's Witnesses?...Christian Science?...and the Unitarians? These are the four biggest organized professional heresies in our city. Thousands of co-workers, neighbors, friends, and family members across our city are being deceived by their teachings.

What do we think about that? Do we care? Do we know what these heresies teach? Would we know how to correct these teachings with God's Word? Should we stand by without trying to help those who are being deceived? Is it that we do not care or is it that we do not know our Bibles very well? Are we afraid that the cults know their lies better than we know the truth? Are we not convinced that God's Word is true?

The Bible paints a grim picture of the end times. It indicates that those who deceive will be given a season to do so at a level never

imagined before (Matt.24:23-24). Deception will increase dramatically. Those who practice deception will even be able to perform what others will interpret as miracles. Their influence will be strong and forceful.

I hope that time frame is a long way off. I don't want to be alive to see that time. But some generation of Christians will. Whoever does live through that time will keep from being deceived only by knowing the truth in God's Word.

3. What can we do to change our ability to discern for ourselves and warn others? The answer is simple. We must begin to seriously study the Bible. We must carve out regularly significant times in our schedules to read and study God's Word. There is no quick fix. Only a consistent commitment over a long period of time will yield the wisdom and understanding we need.

This is hard because there are so many things bidding for our time. But somehow in the midst of busy lives, we must choose to cultivate the eternal above what is temporary. Why not begin today?

Blessings,

Pastor Will

The Letter of 2 John

"Watch out that you don't lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. 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." (8, 9)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Let's outline our verses to see the words and sentences in a different format. This will help our minds pick up on the truth.

- I. Watch out
 - A. that you don't lose what you have worked for
 - B. that you may be rewarded fully

- II. Anyone who runs ahead
 - A. does not continue in the teaching of Christ
 - B. does not have God

- III. Whoever continues in the teaching (of Christ)
 - A. has both the Father and Son

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

You can almost hear beneath the words of John the claims of the false teachers. They claimed their teaching was ahead of the gospel as the Apostles taught it in the beginning. They thought themselves advanced and on the cutting edge of something new. John writes to calm the Christian lady and to instruct her on how to respond to such claims.

Let's take verse 9 first. *Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God*, - The Greek phrase is "proagon" which means to go on ahead or to go too far. John was saying that those false teachers, who claimed to be far ahead of the Apostles' Christianity, had run ahead of the truth and in doing so didn't continue in the real teaching of Christ. As a result, they didn't have God at all. Their claim of having God exclusively was just an illusive pipe dream. God had nothing to do with their "advanced" teaching or with them.

It is interesting that every cult today has the same thing in common with those false teachers of John's day. They all claim to have gone ahead of the Christianity of the Apostles. Take the Mormons, for example. In the early 1800s Joseph Smith claimed to have had a series of visitations from the angel Moroni who he claimed explained an advanced understanding of God's plan of salvation.

It was a revelation that was to be an addition to the gospel of the Bible. In fact, new holy books had to be written (Doctrine of Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, Book of Mormon) to accompany and help one properly understand the old version (the Bible). Joseph Smith repeatedly wrote that Christianity as it was currently understood was all wrong. He claimed that God had done a new thing and had trumped His old gospel with a new version...a more enlightened set of teachings to which he was the bearer of this new good news.

John's words apply to the Mormon church just like it applied to the other false teachers of his day, *"Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ (as the Apostles gave it) does not have God."* Just like in John's day, today these deceivers are persuasive and seem legitimate. But according to John, their teachings are, bluntly put, from hell. They promote a rebellious version of the truth and do not come from God. Nor can their teaching do men any real spiritual good at all.

whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. - We should continue in the teachings of Christ by the Apostles. They were the eye witnesses and those whom the Lord himself entrusted with this Gospel. He commissioned them in Matthew 28:19-20, *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* (not things I will show you one day through another prophet named Joseph Smith. No...things I have already commanded you.) Those who keep faithful to the truth as it is revealed in the Bible have the Father and the Son.

Now verse 8. *"Watch out that you don't lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.* - A stern warning to keep their eyes open (watch out) and notice the danger that was right in front of them. *"...don't loose what you have worked for,"*...it doesn't appear that John means salvation here because he is talking about things they had worked for.

Salvation is by grace through faith and not by works, less anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9) However, if they forsook the

truth and began to follow the doctrine of devils, Paul's words to the Galatians (who had begun to follow another gospel) could apply, *"You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace."* (Galatians 5:4)

It seems John is talking more of the fruit of their Christian labors. Their previous Christian service would be a waste if they began to flirt with the teachings of these false teachers. Their influence and effectiveness, as well as, their various rewards in heaven would be lost. John says to stay faithful so that they are rewarded fully.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?

1. We live in an age where advanced thinking and taking a concept to new levels is all the rage. In our text today, John was certainly not condemning progressive thinking. In fact, Jesus Christ is the touchstone of all thinking. John is simply saying that whatever is out of touch with God's original revelation is not from Him and cannot be right. God's plan of salvation as given in the Bible does not need improved upon.

2. The lesson is simple today...protect ourselves and those we love from false teachers and doctrines. Ask questions, test the spirits, and inspect the fruit. Base everything you believe on the Holy Scriptures.

Are you doing that? Only the Bible is God's Holy Word. Give your heart and mind to the content of it's pages.

Have a great day!

Pastor Will

Before we begin today's study, let's do a quick summary. So far John has given us 4 ways to discern between unholy and holy people and their teachings. **(1)** Agapao style love, verse 5: Do they love the way God does or the way man does? **(2)** Walking in Truth, verse 6: Do they obey God or justify personal sin? **(3)** God becomes man, verse 7: Do they teach that God's Son became fully human or was Jesus something less? **(4)** Authority, verse 8-9: Do they follow the Gospel given by the Apostles or do they insist on adding to it? Jesus' words are so needed in today's spiritual climate.

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits..."
(Matthew 7:15-16)

The Letter of 2 John

¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. ¹¹Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. ¹²I 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. ¹³The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Let's break this passage down to see the sentences in a different format.

- I. If anyone comes to you who does not bring this teaching (that agrees with the Apostles' teaching)
 - A. do not take him into your house
 - B. do not welcome him
 - C. anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work

- II. I have much to write to you
 - A. I do not want to use paper and ink
 - B. I hope to visit you and talk face to face
 - C. so our joy may be complete.
 - D. the children of your chosen sister send their greetings

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The first principle of doing a solid study of the Scriptures is to remember we are reading someone else's mail. These letters were originally written to other people who were going through very specific circumstances. So...our first goal in Bible study is to understand what the original author meant for the original audience to understand. Then and only then can we take the truth discovered and apply it to our lives today.

¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. - At first glance, this statement seems a bit "non Christian"; not very loving, etc. But we have to consider what was going on in that day that would cause John to write this and also how the original readers would have heard this statement.

Back in that day, traveling teachers would come into towns and make arrangements for temporary facilities from which to teach. Evidently, these types of teachers had come into this lady's town and began spreading their "incorrect" version of Christ and his gospel. It was to this scenario that John wrote our verses for today.

John said if a teacher came to town who was teaching lies about Christ and his gospel, she or anyone in her church were not to *"take him into your house or welcome him."* There were not hotels available like there are today. It was very common for travelers to stay with other families. So to provide housing for a false teacher was to provide support for his false message. It was to support a ministry that told lies about Jesus and taught people to believe things God does not honor.

To *"welcome him"* is a phrase that also means to "greet him." Many scholars believe this phrase refers more to a greeting on the street or to welcome him into your fellowship as if his message was a normal part of Christianity. Not only would you be giving the false teacher a sense that his message is good and welcomed within the church but you would also give the community the wrong idea that the theological errors he was teaching were part of the true gospel and condoned by the church.

¹¹Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. - This statement gets at the point John is trying to make. We never want to help people do the wicked work of spreading lies about Christ and His gospel. However, Christians today use these verses to convince

themselves they should not talk to a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness that comes to their door. When we consider the context, this conclusion is not what John was talking about. More on this at the end of today's study.

¹²I 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. ¹³The children of your chosen sister send their greetings. - I wonder what else he wanted to talk with her about? Perhaps he wanted to expound further on the points he began to articulate here or maybe there were different subjects he wanted to speak to her about. We do not know. We don't possess another letter to this person from John and no other writer of the New Testament refers to the contents of such a letter. We don't know if he ever had the chance to visit and speak face to face.

John probably realized what most of us have discovered. Letters (or emails) have their limitations. When writing letters, we can't always communicate the heart we write from, the tone of voice we want to communicate in, or the body language we are writing with. Nothing is quite as effective as face to face communication. Letters are good and useful but for the deeper stuff...face to face is better.

The last phrase regarding *"the children of your chosen sister"* is interesting. It could mean this lady's real nieces and nephews were at a church where John was teaching at when he wrote this note and they sent greetings through him. This verse causes some scholars to think that the *"chosen lady and her children"* of verse 1 is not a lady at all but a church and its members and *"the children of your chosen sister"* of verse 13 refers to another church and its members.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?

1. The truth we should take away from today's study is this. ***We should always show God's love to everyone, even those who are spreading lies about our Savior. But we must be careful to never support their ministry efforts or to encourage them or their message to others. We must always distinguish for our community the true gospel of Jesus Christ from their false teaching.***

Inviting them into our homes or talking with them outside our door or on the street in order to share our testimonies with them or to help

them see the error of their teaching does not violate what John has taught us today. In fact, it is what Christ would do.

When Jesus walked the earth, the Pharisees (a Jewish religious sect), were the worst at perverting the truth of God's Word. Jesus saved his strongest words of rebuke for them. And yet, we see in Luke 14:1-24 Jesus had dinner at a Pharisee's home (if you have time, you should read this section). The whole time Jesus was in that home he used every opportunity to show the Pharisees the error of their ways.

Jesus is our example in this. It is OK to spend time with those who are deceived in their thinking regarding Christ. They do not have "spiritual cooties". They are deceived and have become deceivers. But in doing this we must make sure that our community (neighbors, etc.) don't associate us with their lies. This is not for our sake but for the Truth's sake.

Have a great day!

Pastor Will

Will Mackey

Day 7

The Letter of 2 John

Before we leave this great letter from John, I want us to do a review of the main truths John taught us. This will help to cement these great truths into our hearts and minds so that we can remember them and obey them.

There are three problems presented in John's letter. (1) He is addressing a Christian who is confused and in need of spiritual encouragement. (2) He is addressing how to test the spirits and discern between right and wrong teachers/teachings? (3) He is addressing how to personally interact with such deceivers.

Let's look at the principles of Truth we learned.

1. John gives us four ways to encourage a fellow believer:
 - John encouraged her by expressing his and other's love and appreciation for her.
 - John encouraged her by praying a prayer of blessing for her.
 - John encouraged her by reminding her of spiritual successes and how God has ministered through her in the past.
 - John encouraged her by sharing his plans to visit her in person and address her questions more fully.
2. John gives us four ways to discern between right/wrong teachers/teachings:
 - Test #1: Do they love the way God loves (agapao style)?
 - Test #2: Do they obey God or justify personal sin?
 - Test #3: Do they teach that God's Son was fully human and fully God?
 - Test #4: Do they follow the Bible as written by the Prophets and the Apostles or do they seek to add to it?

3. John gives us insight in how to personally treat a deceiver.
 - Love him agapao style. Care for him, pray for him, carry a spiritual burden for his soul.
 - In no way give support to the false teacher or his ministry. This would include giving him money or purchasing his materials.
 - Continually clarify to the false teacher and your community that his teaching is not supported by the Bible (and know how to prove it).

Thank you for being part of this study with me. I hope it was beneficial to your soul and helped to equip you to know God better and to do His Will.

I hope to study with you again in another book of the Bible.

Pastor Will