

The Urgency of Rejecting False Teachers

To Follow or To Flee?

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For this morning, we're going to turn to the letter of 2 John, and it's a great follow-up to the messages that we have done on 1 John. You know, in 1 John we had the teaching from Christ about what true salvation looks like and the realities of love and obedience and truth that mark a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, someone who has truly been born again, and so we gather together and a church, in a local assembly, as believers who share a common life in Christ and the question is: what are we to do with love and truth that has been given to us from God himself? Well, the important thing to understand is that there is a dual aspect to that. There is a knife, as it were, that has two edges. The love that we show to one another is very important and is part of true belief, but what we're going to see in 2 John here this morning is that the fact that God has given us the truth, the fact that God has redeemed us and saved our souls, puts upon us a responsibility to protect and to defend that truth with every ounce of energy that we have; that part of the responsibility that belongs to the true church of Jesus Christ is to reject false teachers and to separate ourselves from them and to be mindful of our responsibility to protect and defend the truth as we would a child, as it were, that needs our protection. Now, God doesn't need our help to protect the truth, but we are to have an attitude of love toward the truth that wants to protect it, that wants to defend it, that wants to uphold it, and 2 John emphasizes that aspect of a church's responsibility to the truth. It's a wonderful letter and we are only going to cover it here this morning. The book of 2 John teaches us what to do when we encounter false teachers in our lives.

Now, let me give you some historical background that will kind of prepare you for the text. It's not going to seem very relevant at the start, but it quickly will. In the first century and if you've ever had the chance to study Bible backgrounds or New Testament history, I really encourage you to do that. That's one of my favorite fields of study, actually, is to look into the background of the New Testament because it illuminates the Scriptures so well for us. At the time of Christ, of course, the Romans were in charge. The Romans were the dominant world power at the time and at that time and in the years leading up to the time of Christ in the early church, the Romans had done a lot of sophisticated things. They were really masters of earthly technology that existed at the time and for our purposes, I just want to kind of let you know that the Romans had developed a sophisticated system of roads that had greatly facilitated travel compared to what existed before their arrival on the world scene. They had made flat and straight

roads that made it easy for people to travel about. At the same time in the prior 300 years or so since the conquest of Alexander the Great, independent of what the Romans were doing, in a sense, the Greek language had spread throughout the world and it was a common language that was known and spoken by people throughout many different regions and that's what had been going on in the 300 years or so prior to the time of Christ, in part, was that a sophisticated road system was being developed and a common language was taking over.

Now, watch this: what happened as a result, that was all in the providence of God, because those conditions of greater ease in travel and a common language throughout the known world at that time, set the stage for the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's really an impressive act of providence by God that he did this so that when Christ commissioned the apostles in the early church to go out and spread the Gospel, there were a lot of barriers that had been removed. They could travel with greater ease than they could have a few hundred years earlier. They could go and speak a common language even though people did not share the ethnicity of the early disciples. And along with that, the Romans were committed to providing safety along their roads and so the Roman army had a visible presence throughout the road system. All of these things made it so that there was an ease of communication, an ease of travel that made it easy for the Gospel to spread quickly. When we see the spread of the Gospel in the early church in the book of Acts, underlying the text there were these practical underlying effects that were in place that made it possible for communication to go. So in the providence of God, that pre-existing road system and the Greek language facilitated the spread of the Gospel because it made it easy for Christians to travel and preach the Gospel in different regions.

Now, there was an aspect that made it difficult that we can't really appreciate so much today. Our modern hotels were unknown at the time and what little bit of rooming houses that were available in the first century were generally places of ill repute and not a fit place for Christian teachers to travel. So when itinerant Christian teachers were going about on missions to spread the Gospel and to teach, they needed the hospitality of local Christians to give them a place to stay, a place of operations. They needed some place to stay while they were there preaching and you can see remnants of this in the New Testament. In Hebrews 13:2, it says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." So there was a duty, a responsibility, of providing hospitality for these itinerant teachers that were traveling about spreading the Gospel.

Now, we're going to pivot a little bit here at this point with that little bit of background and start to orient our thinking toward the book of 2 John. There was a spiritual risk that accompanied that hospitality because it wasn't just true teachers, it wasn't just the true Gospel ministers that would take advantage of that hospitality, false teachers would take advantage of unsuspecting Christians, saying that, "I'm here as a minister of Christ," but teaching something contrary to the Gospel. They would take advantage of true Christians and the Christians felt like they had a responsibility to provide hospitality in the name of love even to these false teachers, and what the outcome of that, what the effect of that

was, is that they were actually facilitating the false teaching that was going on that these people brought to the area.

So here in 2 John, the Apostle John is writing to address that problem and to correct it and what we see as we look at the book of 2 John is this, is that while we are people of love, we're people of grace, we exercise that love with a mind toward the truth. We love others in truth, not indiscriminately, and John here in the specific first century context is teaching a woman not to practice Christian generosity indiscriminately but be mindful of who is receiving your hospitality so that you advance the Gospel, not hinder it with what you do. What we're going to see at the end is the things that he teaches us here in 2 John are going to be things that apply as well to us in the first century. If you think of someone coming and knocking on the door with 2 x 2, bringing the Watchtower magazine to share with you, this has application to that as well that we're going to address at the end of today's message, but today we just want to see exactly what it is that John says.

So let's dive into the letter and all these things will become clear. Look at the opening greeting that he gives in the first two verses of 2 John. 2 John 1:1-2.

1 The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, 2 for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: 3 Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Notice in these opening verses how he sets the theme for his concern with his repeated use of the word "truth." I as the pastor of Truth, I kind of like that word "truth" and I hope you do also. The Apostle John said, "The elder to the chosen lady whom I love in truth, to all who know the truth for the sake of the truth, Jesus Christ will be with us in truth and in love." So we see immediately, contrary to the tolerant spirit of our age, that there is a defining place for truth in the middle of the New Testament church and in the local church today, that the idea the pursuit of truth is supposed to be preeminent on our minds. John as he wrote this letter is writing to a woman that we don't know who she is now but he seems to be writing to a literal woman and her children who are unknown to us now but were known to John when he wrote and John uses the word "truth" five times in the first four verses and we see from that that truth was what was motivating him even in his greeting, and it set the foundation for everything that follows.

As he opens in truth, as he is speaking to a Christian here, a Christian woman here, you notice the blessing that he conveys to her there in verse 3, "Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." Let's just dwell on that for just a moment here. You have there in verse 3 a summary of God's disposition toward you if you're a believer. If you're a Christian here this morning, God has shown his grace to you, hasn't he? It's okay to nod and affirm that in deference to the glory of God. God has shown his grace to you, hasn't he? Yeah, there we go, we're working on it. He has shown his mercy to you. He has shown kindness to you that you didn't deserve and those of you that have come to Christ for forgiveness

know what it's like to be relieved of a guilty, accusing conscience at the foot of the cross. You know what mercy is like and you know what peace is like, to be reconciled to God, to be truly reconciled to him and to have that true reconciliation overflow in your heart in a subjective sense of peace. This is what God has done for us. He has shown grace and mercy and peace to every true believer in Christ and John says here, "He has not only shown it in the past, it's going to be with us in the future as well." Even in the midst of our challenging circumstances, we look forward to the future with confidence. With a sense of security, let's put it that way, a sense of security that the God who was gracious and merciful to me in the past, who established me in a relationship of peace with him through his Son Jesus Christ, the way that he has dealt with me in the past is an indication of how he's going to deal with me in the future as well. Grace, mercy and peace are going to mark the way that God deals with you in the future just as he has in the past and don't let your present trials, your present struggles cloud that reality from you. The grace and mercy and peace of God are more certain to you as a believer in Christ than the rising of the sun is tomorrow because God is faithful to his character, he is faithful to his people, and he's always going to be gracious, merciful and peaceful toward us. This is the blessing of being a Christian and so John as he opens up this letter, is reminding this woman of the gracious spirit in which God has dealt with us and he says, "Dear lady, I come to you in that same gracious spirit as I write to you here today." Truth and love, grace and mercy and peace, all of the great themes of the Gospel are right there for us.

Well, what does he say to her? I want to give you 2 points and there is kind of a contrast that goes on here in this passage. We're going to see the way that truth and love deals with true believers and the way that truth and love deal with false teachers, and I'm talking specifically today about false teachers, not necessarily everyone that's under their influence. But there is a contrast between the 2 and first we're going to see that truth and love affirm true believers. They affirm true believers. This is the spirit in which the New Testament body, this is the spirit in which a local church operates, that truth and love act in a spirit of affirmation toward one another.

Look at verses four and five with me here. John says as he writes, and remember he's writing to correct her and he does that in time but he opens up with this word of affirmation. He says,

4 I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. 5 Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.

Then he defines love in verse six,

6 And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.

Notice the spirit of affirmation, the spirit of love with which he addresses her. "I'm very glad to hear of your children walking in the truth," and so then he says, "I recognize that in your life and in your family, there is a spirit of obedience that is animating what you do." Someone in spiritual leadership has a duty and a responsibility to give that kind of affirmation when he sees people walking in truth, to affirm them in that and to encourage them in that.

That's what truth and love does and it's not just leadership to people who follow, but it's how we deal with one another in the body of Christ. To be mindful, to think through and to see a pattern of life in someone and to affirm them in it as they walk it. You know the challenges that come in the Christian life, well, we understand. We're walking through that together and so we love one another and affirm one another in that and say, "I appreciate the spirit of obedience that you're showing," and I appreciate as a pastor the spirit of obedience that marks this fellowship already. I appreciate the love for truth that is evident among the people that gather together here. I appreciate the love that you have shown my family and I appreciate the love that you show to one another. I am astonished regularly, you think I'd stop getting astonished by it, even just thinking of Chuck and Kathy, of the continual love and grace that people show to them and the kindness that has been expressed to them even though they are so geographically remote. All of that is worthy of commendation and the way that you extend yourselves to one another is just integral to the foundation of what we're building here at Truth Community Fellowship.

It is a blessing to be a pastor of a place where this affirmation is most appropriate and as we think about what spiritual leadership should be like in the months and years to come of our fellowship, understand that what we aspire after in this fellowship is leadership that knows how to express that love, that knows how to express care for the flock. We're not after high-minded arrogant people that simply want to fight over theology. I don't see any of that spirit here in our fellowship but I just want you to know that this spirit of affirmation that we're talking about here is what's going to mark, by the grace of God, it's what's most certainly going to mark the spiritual leadership in this place. This is what we aspire after, is to have an environment where this can be established in a faint reflection of the love and grace that our Lord has shown to us individually.

Notice in verse 5 how it plays out here. John is writing to this woman to give instruction to her but notice how he expresses it in verse 5. He says, "Now I ask you, lady, I ask you." Isn't that amazing that an apostle of Jesus Christ with full authority would write to someone and say, "I ask you," as opposed to coming down with a harsh spirit of command; with that dictatorial mindset that we've all seen in spiritual leadership from time to time? This word "ask" expresses a request made from an equal to another equal. He's writing as an apostle but he writes this lady and he says, "I ask you," and the fact that a man has authority doesn't mean that he has to exercise it and display the strong arm of authority whenever something needs to be done. It can be done in a proper spirit. Here the apostle John defers to this woman even though he could have commanded her with apostolic authority. That's amazing.

It reminds me, one of my daughters and I were in Maine a few years ago and we visited a church on a Sunday morning, just kind of walked in off the street, didn't know what we were finding ourselves in. But the pastor was up front and he was making his announcements. He was announcing some kind of prayer vigil that was coming up that following weekend or something like that and we're just there, we are tourists basically and kind of watching what's happening and he said, and I'll never forget this, as he was encouraging, I'm using that in quotations, encouraging his people to come, he said this and this is almost a direct quote, he said, "As the God appointed spiritual authority in this church, I'm not asking you to come. I am commanding you to come." Wow, really? That's the way you're going to handle your spiritual authority? That kind of heavy-handed club upon people who are already there? This is the way we interact with one another in the body of Christ? You say, "I'm the God appointed authority and I command you to come"? Oh please, is this the spirit of the Christ who said, "I am gentle and humble in heart"? Is this the spirit of the apostle in 2 John 5?

Look at it with me again with that contrast in mind. He said, "Now I ask you, lady, I ask you, not as writing you a new commandment but the one that we've had from the beginning that we love one another." The spirit with which authority is held is so very, very important. John here shows us in the writing here in verse 5 and verse 6 that spiritual leadership is exercised in a reciprocal relationship of love that permeates it and when a flock is obedient to the Scriptures, when a flock is showing forth the fruit of the Spirit, when a flock is serving and loving one another, the only appropriate way for a spiritual leader to act in that context is to affirm them and to show a same kind of reciprocal love to them rather than wielding a hammer just because you happen to hold an office. A man might hold the office but he is to hold it with the spirit which animated the one who put him there in the first place, the Lord Jesus Christ. So I just want you to know as we look to the future and in the coming months as we'll be dealing with leadership and those kinds of issues, that that's spirit which the leadership of Truth Community Fellowship is going to be marked by in the years to come. That's what we want. That's what we aspire after because we believe it's the spirit of New Testament leadership.

So truth and love affirm true believers and so look at verse 6 here as we wrap this particular point up. He says, "And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it." Now, this is an aspect of love that I don't think we can emphasize enough in some ways, is that the spirit of Christian love in your life and mine is not marked primarily by a sentiment, a feeling of affection toward someone else, that's not the primary aspect of love from the New Testament perspective at all. Notice what John says here, is that love obeys. Love is obedient to the one who saved it. Our love is expressed by obedience to the commandments of God. Look at what he says there again in verse 6. He says, "This is love that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment just as you have heard from the beginning that you should walk in it." He's saying there at the end, "I'm not telling you anything new." He says, "This is what the Spirit of Christianity has been all along."

So love is marked by obedience to the word of God and if we are walking in obedience to God, then our relationships are going to be what they should be. We have said this before but a man cannot claim to be loving the people of God when he is walking in sin, even if that sin is not yet public. True love is marked by obedience. Your obedience to God motivates me to greater obedience in my life and hopefully vice versa. We stimulate one another to love and good deeds through our obedience to the word of God and so as we walk together, as we develop together the life of this fellowship, we understand that there is going to be this spirit of affirmation, of true love that marks leadership, but we also understand that as a people we're going to be serious about obedience to the word of God. That we care about that. That God's word is an authority in our lives and we submit to it enough to the point that we change the way that we live in order to correspond to it, and when we fall short, we confess our sins and we repent and there is just a spirit of love and obedience and repentance that marks a true body of believers in Christ. So even as we see the joy of love and grace and peace and mercy expressed in this, we're reminded of the fact that being a Christian comes with a responsibility to obey the word of God and so I just ask you to examine your life this past week with the way that you have been, was that the spirit that animated your life? Were you bent toward obedience or bent toward disobedience? True Christians are bent toward obedience. This is part of Christian love and so we see this spirit of truth and love that affirms believers and walks in the truth.

Now, not everyone, of course, is a Christian. Not every teacher who gets up and opens the Bible is teaching the true Gospel of Christ, right? You know that. We know that all too well from painful experience. What do we do with teachers that contradict the Gospel? How do we respond to them. Where are the boundaries of love? Where is the boundary of the service to one another? Where are the boundaries of the sacrifice that we make, in the effort that we make in the name of Christian love? Well, John is going to show us this in verse 7 and we're going to see that while truth and love affirm true believers, what we're going to see now in our next point is that truth and love reject false teachers. False teachers are not entitled to receive the overflow of our love for Christ. They are not entitled to receive the benefit of our sacrifice and this is what John is going to get into in verse 7.

For some, this may be new. For some of us, this may be counterintuitive, but John is showing that there are boundaries to the way that we express love and he's going to explain that to us here in verse 7. He says, "walk in obedience," verse 6, "walk according to His commandments." Truth informs the way that we exercise love, okay? Our commitment to the word of God, our commitment to the true Gospel, our commitment to the true Christ, informs the way that we exercise love toward the world around us and so in verse 7, having called for love and obedience, he says in verse 7, "For," this is an outworking of the call to love and obedience, verse 7,

7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. 8 Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. 9 Anyone who goes

too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

Watch this in verse 10 now, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching," notice, they're coming to you here,

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; 11 for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

Wow, this is a serious passage. This is why we need to unpack this here this morning. John is saying that truth and love reject false teachers and what can we say about these deceivers? Look at verse 7 here. They have gone out into the world and he says, "This is the deceiver and the antichrist." That should pull you up short if these things are new to you, if this concept is new to you, this idea of discernment. You know, in 1 John, I'm actually using 1 John appropriately here, in 1 John 4:1 he said, "Don't believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God." We have a responsibility, and obligation, even a privilege, you might say, to test teaching that comes to us to see if it's in accord with biblical doctrine and John warns us in verse 7 that "many deceivers have gone out." It doesn't surprise us to see false teachers proliferating, to see television airwaves dominated by people who don't teach the true Gospel. That doesn't surprise us at all.

Scripture tells us to expect that and it tells us not to be gullible, that Christians are not to be, if I can put it this way, it's a little bit gruff perhaps, but look, you and I as Christians, we're not meant to be suckers. We're not meant to be gullible people who just believe everything that we hear. We're not supposed to simply submit to everyone who claims to speak for God without testing their claim to see if it's valid or not. We are meant to be discerning people who love the truth and do not tolerate someone getting up and contradicting it. We can't live that way. We could never approach true Christianity that way because – follow me here, follow me here – we could never accept that because we love Christ too much. We're too loyal to him. Our hearts are so abounding and overflowing with the grace, mercy and peace that he has showered on us, that we can't tolerate the thought of someone coming in, stealing his glory, leading people away from Christ with their false teaching that leads to eternal damnation. There is too much at stake. Our heart affections are so wrapped up in Christ, our heart affections are so attached to our Lord Jesus Christ to see someone diminish his glory with false teaching is something that we simply can't bear.

So we test the spirits and we realize as we test them that there are many deceivers. John said so right there, "many deceivers have gone out into the world." It couldn't be any plainer than that. and we realize this, beloved, we realize that false teaching is not simply a matter of a difference of opinion. This is not simply a matter of, "Oh, he sees it a little differently than I do. He sees it differently than I do." No, we have to realize that we're in the midst of a real spiritual conflict here and we have to realize that false teaching, someone who promotes a false Gospel, is not an innocent victim but they are a

mouthpiece for the deceiver and the antichrist. False teachers are mouthpieces of Satan and so we can't deal with this lightly. We remember going all the way back to Genesis 3, we remember that Satan instigated the fall of the world. The pristine position that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the first 2 chapters of Genesis as literal human beings, I might add, literal historical flesh and blood, we realize that Satan came in and tempted them and the colossal fall of the human race pursued and we live in the aftermath of that. This is the wickedness of Satan. This is the destruction that he leaves behind so we realize that when someone is teaching a false Gospel as a mouthpiece of the deceiver, that we can't simply act like that is a matter of indifference and not something that is really all that important. No, we realize this matters, that this is bad, you might say. False teachers destroy biblical Christianity. They actively dismantle that which we say we hold dear and so we don't treat it lightly.

Now, why must we reject false teachers? Let me give you some help here to think through this and to kind of put some flesh on the skeleton that I just outlined for you there. Why is it that we must reject false teachers? I'm going to give you some things to think about here. First of all, false teachers destroy our redemption. What I mean by destroy is they interfere with the teaching about redemption. They can't take our salvation away, but as we seek to teach about redemption to those who do not know Christ, false teachers come in and destroy the message. They interfere with it. Their teaching makes redemption impossible to those that follow them.

How is that? How do they destroy our redemption? I'm going to give you 3 quick points here. First of all, false teachers destroy our revelation. Our revelation, and here's what I mean by that: when someone comes bringing a false doctrine about Christ, teaching that he is anything other than true God in true human flesh, whenever someone teaches something contrary to that, they are destroying our revelation. Jesus Christ said in the Gospel of John 14:9, he said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." He's claiming complete equality with the invisible God. He's saying, "When you see me, you have seen the Father. You see exactly what God the Father is like when you see me in human flesh." When we read about him in the Gospels, we're seeing exactly what the Father is like because Jesus said, "I and the Father are one," John 10:30.

Now, watch this: when a false teacher comes and says Jesus Christ is not God in human flesh, that he's a created angel that God appointed and then God did everything else through that created being as the Jehovah's Witnesses teach or any of the various false doctrines of Christ that you can pick up from false groups like the Mormons or others, what happens there is that they are destroying the revelation of God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. When they say that Christ is not God in human flesh, then here's the consequence of that: when you say that Christ is not God, then we as a human race, we have not seen God at all then. If Christ is not God in human flesh, then the entire human race has not seen him revealed as the Bible says that we have been. When they deny Christ, when they deny the deity of Christ, they are taking away the revelation of God from us because they're saying that he's someone other than what he is in direct contradiction to what Jesus said, "If you have seen Me you have seen the Father." They say, "You're not equal with the Father." Then we've never seen God at all.

This is very serious. This is destructive to God's revelation of himself to us and it destroys and it robs Christ of his glory. Can you imagine having God in front of you, having the Son of God in human flesh in front of you, as it were, and you say, "You're not God"? As a true believer, you react against that. You are righteously indignant against that. "Don't take away the glory of my Savior! Don't pull him down from his throne and say that he's a mere man or he's some kind of an angel or some prophet and nothing more! Don't say that! No! No! No! This is God in human flesh. Don't destroy our revelation of God."

Secondly, they not only destroy our revelation, they destroy our mediation. A mediator is someone who goes between 2 parties that are in conflict with one another. 1 Timothy 2:5, I won't have you turn there, Paul said, "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Now listen, in the simplest terms that I can put it in: if Jesus Christ is not truly God and truly man, we have no mediator with God. Think about a bridge. A bridge has to make contact with both shorelines if it's going to deliver you safely to the other side. If you're going to cross from one place to another over a body of water, that bridge has to make contact with both shorelines in order for you to get there. If it stops short, you end up drowning; your car ends up in the river. Well, it's the same way spiritually. If we're going to have a mediator between God and man, we need someone who is fully God and fully man in order to bridge the gap and you need a mediator because your sin has separated you from God, Isaiah 59:2.

So there must be full, complete contact, full union with humanity for Christ to identify with us and there must be full, complete unity with the essence of God if he's going to bring us back to the Father. Watch this: when a false teacher denies the deity of Christ, he has blown the bridge up. You can no longer get to God through Christ because he's not God himself. He can't deliver you over to the deity side of the equation. It's not simply a matter of different theology, this destroys the Gospel. This takes away our redemption if what they say is true. So we reject that. We don't affirm them for their million-dollar smile and their well-placed hair and we're not intimidated by the fact that sometimes they can fill basketball arenas week by week with their false teaching. We don't care about that. We're not intimidated by that. We're not attracted to that because all of the external stuff that accompanies that is no substitute for true redemption. If you can gather 10 million followers but deny Christ, you'll find us opposed. We'll stand against that. There's a great church father, Athanasius, when the doctrine of the Trinity was almost on the verge of extinction and he alone was standing against it and someone came to him and said, "Athanasius, the world is against you," and Athanasius said, "Then I'm against the world."

Our love for the truth compels us to resist false teaching because they destroy our revelation, they destroy our mediation. The third way: they destroy our redemption. We have looked at it on the deity side, let's think about it from the humanity side for a moment. Those false teachers, if they make Christ to be someone other than fully God and fully human, if somehow Jesus is not a man then, beloved, we don't have an example for living a godly life. The Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 2:21, let's turn back there since

we're so close. It's just a few pages back just before 1 John. You can find 1 Peter 2:21, I want you to see this, and as we're kind of expressing these things in a negative way, but what we're seeing here is the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ and the greatness of what he has done for us. False teachers who would deny the humanity of Christ steal away our example. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:21, he says, "You have been called for this purpose," talking about enduring suffering with patience. He says, "You have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth." Look, the only way that Christ can be an example for you and me is if he was true humanity. If he was genuinely a man without diminishment. We can't use an angel for our example. We can't use a mere spirit being to show us how to live life in the flesh here on earth. But because Christ has fully identified with our humanity, we can look at him in the Gospels, we can look at his life as it is explained in the epistles and say, "Ah, that's the way that I am to live in response to this situation." We can take Christ as our example because he is fully human. He is a real man, just as much as he is real God so what we teach about Christ is essential to everything.

We reject false teachers because they destroy our redemption in those 3 specific ways. They rob us of Christ. False teachers rob sinners from their hope. They take Christ away and put in an imposter in place, a Satanic substitute. They call them after a false Christ when they are not busy calling them after themselves, these false teachers and, "Just dial the 800 number and give us your pledge." Oh. You know that you've had your heart converted when the thought of false teaching and someone proclaiming a false Christ, it bothers you. You react against it. You can't handle, as it were, you can't tolerate the thought of God's word being denied, of Christ being diminished. This is all part of living out truth in love.

Well, John gives another reason here to reject false teachers in addition to the fact of the impact that they have on the teaching of redemption. Secondly, and this is kind of personal to each one of us, false teachers have the potential to do this: they diminish our reward. They diminish our reward. Look at verses 8 and 9 here, "Watch yourselves." Remember, this is in the context of truth and love, of dealing with deceivers, and he says verse 8, "Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son." He says there in verse 8, "Watch yourselves. In light of everything that I'm saying," he says, "Watch yourselves. Be careful. Look out. Caution. Danger ahead." And the verb tense here in the original language calls for ongoing action. This is to be an ongoing mark of believers and of local churches. John says, "Be careful as you contemplate this consideration. Be careful so that your," watch this, "so that your eternal reward from God would not be diminished by participation in the evil works of these deceivers." He says, "Your eternal reward, the depth and breadth of your eternal reward is influenced somehow in the judgment of God, he is somehow influenced by the way that you respond to false teachers and by the way that you interact with them."

This reminds us that while we have been delivered from the ultimate eternal judgment of God for our sins, that we are still going to give an account of ourselves before God and he is going to reward us based on the nature of the faithfulness of our Christian lives and somehow throughout all of eternity, how we have lived in this life is going to be somehow recompensed by God. He's going to reward us in measure to our faithfulness. We don't know how all of that is going to work out, but we just know that he's going to bless us according to our faithfulness. And Jesus spoke those words when we enter into the presence, "Well done, thou good and," what? "Faithful servant." Well, one of the aspects of our faithfulness is the way that we think and respond to false teachers and what John is saying here in verses 8 and 9, he says, indiscriminate involvement with false teachers is so serious that it will diminish your eternal reward. He says, "Don't go there. Don't sacrifice your eternal reward for a wrong conception of what Christian love means that you should do."

And people say and I've had these conversations numerous times, often with people trying to sort out, as they are trying to come out of false churches, they'll say, "You know, I think what I'll do is I'll stay in this false church. I know their teaching is false but what I want to do is I want to try to influence them from inside. I want to be an agent for change in this false church." That's the wrong way to look at it. That's completely the wrong way to look at it. You can't spread the true Gospel in the midst of a false system. You have to leave the false system and then call people out of it, "Come with me. Come out with me." As long as you're inside a false church, as long as people who are converted are, for example, try to stay in the Roman Catholic Church and they try to stay there and live out the Christian life in the midst of that false system, it doesn't work. As long as you stay under the umbrella of this false authority, you're communicating that, "It's really not that serious. It's not so bad. I can actually stay here and function. I can stay here." No, no, Jesus says, "You've got to come out."

Look over to 2 Corinthians 6:14 where we see this principle enunciated also. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore,'" he says, "'come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord." We can't continue. It's hard for people to understand this and I get the motivation. I had this conversation just so recently with a very sweet family trying to work through these issues. In their sense of love for the people there, they say, "I want to stay and help them," but that is a misguided application of Christian love because your greatest loyalty, your greatest faithfulness must be to Christ and Christ says, "Come out from them. Be separate from them. Be with true believers. You've got to be with true believers if you're going to grow. You've got to be with true believers if you're going to function in the body of Christ."

So John is saying the same thing here. Turn back to 2 John 1:8-9. These false teachers are a threat to redemption; somehow it's going to diminish your eternal reward to continue on

with them and so John exhorts this lady that he was writing to in the first century directly, he says in verse 10, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds." He says, "You've got to come out and be away from that. You can't be associated with that. You can't lend your financial support to them. You can't lend your moral support to them. You can't be under their authority. You can't be under the authority. You can't be under the leadership. You can't be under the teaching of someone who is teaching a false Gospel. To do that would be to follow a false shepherd who leads the sheep to destruction. To change the metaphor, it's to follow a wolf in sheep's clothing as though everything was okay." You see, true Christianity brings with it a responsibility to separate from the error that you once were dominated by. It brings with you a responsibility to separate out for the sake of being loyal to the one who sanctified himself for the salvation of your soul.

So John says, "Reject them." He says, "Do not give hospitality to them." Here we go, we've come full circle with the opening here. He says, "Don't give hospitality to them. When you extend that kind of misguided grace to them, you are actually helping their wicked ministry. You're participating in it. You're making it possible. You're enabling them to continue what they're doing and they're on a mission to destroy redemption. You can't do that," he says to her. "Do not give aid to men who undermine the truth." Love keeps the commandments of God. Love is loyal to the word of God. Love is faithful to the one who saved him and so don't help men that are working at cross purposes with the thing that you hold most dear, your eternal salvation.

You see, there are limits to love and so John had given a first century strategy. There is brilliance in this. Remember the whole providential circumstantial nature of things. As people traveled about, they needed local hospitality in order to stay and operate. John says, "When the church refuses that hospitality to these false teachers," it's brilliant. It's utterly brilliant. It makes it so it hinders that false ministry from happening. It makes it more difficult for them to operate. If they had no place to stay, they would have no base of operation and they would start to wither on the vine. So he says, "Don't participate. Don't help them. Keep your door closed when these men show up to you."

Now, let's just look at verses 12 and 13 briefly and then I want to apply this and work it all out because I'm sure there are questions in your mind about how this applies and I want to help you with that. Verses 12 and 13, John says,

12 Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full. 13 The children of your chosen sister greet you.

He says, "I've got more to say about this but it would be better to say it in person so I'm going to put my pen down for now and I look forward to being with you." Even there, he ends on this note of grace. He has corrected her and said, "You need to be aware of the danger of what's going on here, but I still love you. I'm going to show up and then we're

going to speak and then we'll have a greater time of joy and fellowship together." So he starts with affirmation, he corrects her, and then he ends on a note of affirmation as well.

Well, how do we apply this in the 21st century? False teachers don't need our homes to stay? Is this just a relic of the past that is interesting to look at but has no real relevance to us? No, it tells us a lot. We've already seen some, that people who are converted after being in a false system, they need to come out of that false system. It needs to be clear and I've seen so many times, I remember a friend of mine many years ago who chose to stay in the Catholic Church and it was just destructive to everything in his life. He was trying to live out true Christianity in the midst of Catholicism and it just didn't work and he needed to get out right away. He needed to get out early on; get in a place where truth is taught, not the perpetuation of the errors that held you in darkness. Why would you do that? I say that in complete love. Why would you do that? If you didn't find salvation in the place that you were at and now you have found it, why would you stay in the place that held you in darkness and never told you the truth to begin with? Why would you do that? That just doesn't make sense.

Now, let me approach it this way: some of you say, "What does this mean when I have relationships with people that are in false churches? Are you saying that I shouldn't interact with them?" No. No, that's not what we're saying at all. Remember, we're talking about those that are really propagating the doctrine, false teachers, not those that are under their sway. I know that some of you have close relationships with people that are in false religions and you're talking with them and establishing relationships with them. Beloved, that's exactly what you're supposed to do, to love them and encourage them and show by your life and by your words and by your testimony the reality of Christ. You know, we go and we make disciples of all the nations so it presupposes that the people that we're dealing with are lost and a lot of them are going to be lost in the midst of false religion. So I can only encourage you to keep doing what you're doing and be faithful to those relationships and share Christ in the context of those relationships.

What we have in mind here in 2 John is not so much those that are under the domination of that kind of darkness, we're talking about the people who propagate it; the people who come and bring the teaching and are actively seeking to spread it. We're thinking about even the cultists who knock on your door. What do we do with the cultists that knock on the door? Well, I want to give you my pastoral perspective on that. Here's my pastoral perspective on that, first of all, let me preface it and kind of make a bridge with what I just said. If you have a heart for people that are in false religions, for Mormons, for Jehovah's Witnesses and all of that, I have had friendships with sweet people that are lost in the midst of that. If you have a heart for that, I encourage you to cultivate relationships but outside of the confrontation at the front door because at the front door, something different is going on.

Now, let me explain this: 2 John is addressing a different context than somebody who knocks on your front door. It's addressing a context of overnight hospitality and providing a base for false teachers and so it doesn't apply directly. You know, when people see, verse 10, "Don't receive them into your house. Don't give them a greeting."

You can't apply it in exactly the same way, take it as a direct application to the 21st century context because it was talking about overnight lodging, not this confrontation at the door. But still, with that in mind, with that qualification in mind, my pastoral counsel to you when cultists show up at the door is not to let them in and not to let them try to teach you.

Let me give you some reasoning for that. First of all, we have to come back to, look at verse 7 with me again. We're going to try to set some perspective on this as we close. When people come, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, look at verse 7, "This is the deceiver and the antichrist." When a cultist shows up at your door, realize that something significant spiritually is happening here. A mouthpiece of Satan has arrived at your threshold and, beloved, I know that there are some that just love a good argument, love a good theological debate and going back and forth, but we have to step back from that and understand something: we all underestimate and I include myself in this statement, we all underestimate the power of Satanic doctrine. We underestimate the power of Satanic doctrine. The Bible says that the devil is a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Someone who comes bringing false teaching about Christ, actively promoting it, again, we're not talking about the person you know in your neighborhood that you've got a different context to, we're talking about someone arriving at the door and saying, "I am here to teach you about Watchtower. Or I want to tell you about Joseph Smith," and they're coming here with the intention of being your instructor. My voice gets firm because there is a lot at stake here. Understand that Satan disguises himself and brings himself in the form of false teaching and don't underestimate the fact that he is a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. This is a threat. This is a spiritual threat. Don't act like this is a vacuum cleaner salesman who has shown up wanting to give you a new Hoover. Do they still make Hoovers? I don't know. You get my point regardless. The devil has brought people to your doorstep to try to distract you away. Don't underestimate that.

Secondly, and I'm just helping you understand why this is my pastoral counsel, I'm not exactly saying this in the sense...this is my sense of how to apply this. We're outside the biblical text in some ways in this point but I want you to understand why I feel so strongly about this as a pastor. Point 1: we all underestimate the power of Satanic doctrine. We don't realize the threat that it is to our thinking and our philosophy and our worldview. Secondly, most of us overestimate our biblical skill. Some cults, especially Jehovah's Witnesses, absolutely abuse the Greek language. Very few Christians are prepared to refute that on the spot and suddenly you find yourself with someone teaching you what the Greek means and, trust me, they have no idea what they're talking about. If you have questions about that, let me share some things with you later. That's just a fact. But they abuse the Greek because they know that you can't refute it and so they come in and they confuse and they state things that aren't true and they say, "The Greek says this," and you're left not knowing how to deal with that. Very few Christians are in a position to just refute that on the spot. Why put yourself in that position of allowing confusion to come in, especially if your children are gathered around? Why would you do that?

Thirdly, I don't believe that we should help them gain an entrance to our unsuspecting neighbors. "Well, those good Christians just down the street, your Christian neighbors talk to us." "Oh really? Well, okay. Come on in." And you facilitated their threat to the people around you. Let me say this, if you want to minister to them, go on the offensive. Be prepared and go on the offensive. Don't give them a platform to speak their lies to you. Don't make your home a place where Christ can be actively denied by these people who want to do wickedness. Don't give them that platform. Instead, if you want to minister to them, warn them of their error. "Oh, my friend, I know more than I wish I knew about Mormonism. I know more than I wish I knew to know about Jehovah's Witnesses. You're in a deceptive system of religion. Let me warn you to come out of that." Then give them a tract or give them a CD and send them on their way. Don't give them the platform to become your instructor. You should not invite them into your home, in my opinion, and give them a platform to tell you lies.

If you have a heart for people that are lost in those religions, pray and ask God to give you relationships outside of that context where you can interact with them where there is not that role of instruction that is being introduced into it. People at work, people in your neighborhood, "Hey, come over and let's talk." It's in a different environment. But when the cultist shows up saying, "I'm here to tell you about Jehovah." Oh please, please, you see, the truth about Christ is essential and when men tamper with the truth, they have no claim on our love, they have no claim on our generosity and 2 John teaches us to put up boundaries, put up barriers that make it more difficult for them to spread their lies, rather than making it easier and assisting them in the task. That's some pastoral advice for you, no extra charge.

Beloved, do you see? the truth is essential and that our call on life supremely is to be faithful to the Lord who saved us and to be faithful to the Gospel that reveals him and everything else is subsidiary to that and God has given us direction on how to deal with false teachers. He says, "Be careful. Watch out. Recognize the threat. Guard yourself against it. Don't help them spread their lies." Put yourself in a position where you're able to be the one who is giving the words of hope rather than the recipients of the lies. And in all of this, the great news is, Jesus said, Matthew 28, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." 1 John 4, 1 John, that's right, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." While we take these threats seriously, we're unafraid. We realize that the Lord is with us and we move forward with confidence but we handle the truth and we defend the truth in the way that he has told us to do, not in the ways of our own making. We love Christ and we just want to be faithful to him.

Let's bow in prayer.

Father, every one of us has come out of darkness in 1 degree or another, those of us that know Christ. Father, someone came and brought us the Gospel. Someone gave us a Bible, gave us a book, gave us a tract, spoke with us at length about our souls. Lord, we want to be people like that in our fellowship. We want to be people who are actively sharing the Gospel and reaching into a dark world but, Father, we realize that we can't be indiscriminate and that we need to be careful, that Satan sends his mouthpieces in an

effort to confuse the truth and to lead us astray. Lord, I pray that as we try to live out these different obligations of sharing the Gospel and yet guarding against false teachers, that you would give us wisdom and balance, a spirit of loyalty and faithfulness to you, and a spirit of love and compassion on those who are in darkness and yet, Father, at the same time, a spirit that isolates and rejects the teachers, those men and women who propagate false doctrine and confuse the truth and put up barriers to people finding the narrow way that leads to life. Lord, would you just by your Spirit who indwells us, by your Spirit who is sent to help us, would you by your Spirit, enable us to carry out what you have us to do?

Lord, we ask you once more as we have asked you so many, many times here in this place and we'll continue to ask you until you pour out your blessing until we say, "Stop, we can't take anymore," Father, would you by your Spirit convert hearts under the sound of this ministry? Not only this pulpit but the lives of those who come? Father, would you make us instruments of salvation and would you give us visible fruit of true conversions of people who once walked under the domination of the devil but through our ministry are brought into the light? Father, we want that not for our sake but for the sake of the Gospel and for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ and for the sake of those souls that currently are on the broad path that leads to destruction. Would you just be faithful to your word and bless our efforts at ministry so that we could see sinners saved and changed and that Christ would receive more glory from what flows out of this ministry and out of our own individual lives? We pray all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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