



**SESSION OBJECTIVE: 2 JOHN 1-13**

To understand the simplicity of Jesus' commandments to His people.

## Simplify

My wife and I cleaned out our living room this past weekend. While we are sheltering-in-place, we have been trying to come up with simple but impactful projects to undertake since we are stuck at home. Rather than being “stuck at home,” we are making the most of it. It’s been a lot of fun, actually. While cleaning out one of



the drawers in our TV stand, I found an old guidebook for a video game I played years ago. The game was so intricate and had so many layers of story and complexity, the most effective way to play it was with the guidebook. The book simplified the gameplay. It took a complicated adventure and made it pretty straightforward.

The Bible is often seen as complicated. If you are newer to studying it, or have never really dug down into it and learned the basic, overacting biblical narrative, it can be daunting to study. “How do I know what this all means?” “What if I do something wrong?” “What if I forget some of the Old Testament laws?” Questions like these are not uncommon. One of the great strengths of 2 John (and really 1 John and 3 John as well), is that it simplifies so much of our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. How do I follow Christ? “To believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us” (1 John 3:23). 2 John reminds us of this command, and gives a simple and yet powerful exposition on what obedience looks like.

## Truth and Love

The two major themes of 2 John are “truth” and “love.” Below is an outline of the two terms and their meanings and significance.

### **TRUTH**

The idea of truth is fundamental to the Christian message and worldview. Everything that we believe about God, Jesus, humanity, and eternity is truth. It isn't the opinion of men, or some religious position. The Scripture is revelation, or the revealing of truth from a Divine Creator. Psalm 25:5 says, “Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.” Isaiah 45:19b says, “I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right.” The Apostle John wrote in His Gospel account, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Jesus, His incarnation, His teaching, and all of His actions are all the truth of who God is. We live our lives in light of that truth, bearing witness to the objective plan of salvation that God has instituted in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

### **LOVE**

The word here in the Greek is the verb ἀγαπάω, a derivative of the noun ἀγάπη. ἀγάπη is, of course, the highest form of love in the New Testament and one that is fully demonstrated by God towards His covenant people. To love in this manner, then, means to love unconditionally, without strings attached. The call to love one another in this manner mirrors the love that Jesus has for the church. This love is not motivated by selfish gain, and it does not look for repayment. It is a love that is generated by the Holy Spirit and seeks only to benefit the object of love. Love is a fascinating concept in the Scripture, namely because it is one of the only attributes that God not only enacts but that God is described by. The Apostle John writes in 1 John 4:7-8, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Truth emanates from God, but God is not ever described as truth. Love is not only *from* God, but God *is* love.

### **LIVING IT OUT**

Truth is actually shaped and motivated by love. Why share the truth of the Gospel with a dying world? Because love compels you to. Why love one another? Because the truth compels you to. Truth and love are the cyclical motion of a born again believer.

## The Anti-Truth

The Apostle John warns us of what the opposite of truth looks like in verse 7: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.” This is not to be confused with Satan himself, but rather, these deceivers that John mentions here could be seen instead as missionaries of Satan who carry a false Gospel that damns rather than saves.

The first aspect of denying the truth is denying the incarnation of Jesus Christ. These deceptive teachings centered on the bodily resurrection and return of Jesus Christ. It isn't until the 2nd century that the heresy known as Gnosticism creeps into the scene, but certainly here in the first century were the early stages of what eventually became Gnosticism. This was likely a form of docetism, a term derived from the Greek word δοκέω which means, “to seem to appear.” The Docetist and later Gnostics taught that Jesus merely *appeared*, but did not have a physical body. The Gnostics believed that this teaching was a hidden teaching that only the truly enlightened had come to understand. John warns of such deceivers, and draws us back to the simplicity of the Gospel.

John continues in verse 9: “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God.” To *abide* (Gk. μένω) means literally, “to remain or stay.” In other words, the Christian life is not a sprint, but a marathon. Abiding has the idea of endurance built into it. There will be many doctrines that will come and go, and some of them will seem enticing; John warns us to remain in the Gospel.

#### **A NOTE ON CULTURAL CONTEXT**

John makes a statement in verses 10 and 11 that could be misinterpreted if not careful. John writes, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.” This particular letter is written to, “the chosen lady and her children,” a reference to a home church and its congregants.

The elder’s command in verses 10 and 11 could have a dual meaning, and ones that are not mutually exclusive of another. On the one hand, it could mean to avoid inviting in and showing hospitality to itinerant preachers who are propagating a false Gospel. This kind of practice, staying in the home of a stranger or inviting a stranger to stay in your home, was normal in the ancient world. Inns were scarce and had a dubious reputation; traveling ministers much preferred to stay in the homes of people of faith. John is warning against taking in false teachers who deny the foundational elements of the faith; “do not even greet them.” This doesn’t mean to not speak to them, or challenge their false teaching. On the contrary, the idea of a greeting connotes blessing and fellowship.

The other way this passage could be interpreted is in the context of the home being the church itself. Since churches were often in homes, the elder could be warning against inviting the itinerant false teachers in to teach their false doctrine in the gathering. Once again, the thrust of this command is to not bless, support, encourage, or give aid to false teachers. It is important to remember, however, that these are false teachers that the elder is referring to, and not just any person who believes differently than you. Don’t conflate this command to mean you can shut out any friend or family member with differing views than you. On the contrary, it is kindness that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

## **Study Questions**

### **Day One**

1. Read 2 John 1. Who is this letter written to? According to the notes, how do we interpret this?

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2. Read 2 John 1-2. Who loves the elect lady and her children? Why? What truth is John referring to?

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### **Day Two**

1. Read 2 John 3. What three elements does John include in his benediction? From whom do these three elements flow? Write a brief sentence about each of these elements, and give your own definition of each of them.

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- 2. Read 2 John 4-5. Why did John rejoice greatly? Which commandment was John referring to? (Hint: See 1 John 3:23)

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### Day Three

- 1. Read 2 John 6. How does John define love here?

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- 2. Read 2 John 7. What makes someone a, “deceiver?” What does John call them?

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### Day Four

- 1. Read 2 John 8-9. What does John warn us to do? What is at stake if we fall into false doctrine?

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- 2. Read 2 John 10-13. What final warning does John give? What was John’s hope regarding communication with this church again? Who are the, “the children of the elect sister” likely a reference to?

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## Week 7 Discussion: False Teachers

2 John is a short letter, but even still the Apostle John makes some very clear and concise statements against false teachers and giving them support. Talk as a group about how you identify false teachers, why they are dangerous, and what your responsibility is towards them.

- 1. Icebreaker: Do you feel comfortable with calling out false teachers? Why or why not?
- 2. Do you know of anyone who has gotten caught up in false teaching and left the church because of it? What was that experience like?
- 3. What is your responsibility as a believer towards false teachers? Apart from not supporting them, should you be vocal about their false teaching and warn others of it? Why or why not?
- 4. “God can still use false teachers for His purposes.” Do you agree or disagree with this? If you agree, does it mean we should just be silent when it comes to false teachers? Or are we still commanded to speak out against them? Why or why not?
- 5. How do truth and love work together when it comes to identifying false teachers?

## Takeaways:

- 1. Believers are called to live out the truth of the Gospel, but to do so in a way that is motivated by love.
- 2. John warns us to not support or encourage false teachers, but to counter their error with truth in love.

### PRAYER REQUESTS: