

Watch Out for Deceivers

2 John 1:1-13

SS Lesson for 04/26/2015

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson warns us to **Watch Out for Deceivers**. The **study's aim** is to learn how to identify deceivers who lead believers away from God's truth and to stand firm in God's truths, discerning those in error. The **study's application** is to practice Christian love, realizing it does not include accepting false teachers. (*Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*).

Key Verse: 2 John 1:8

Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Getting to his point immediately, John expressed his concerns (a) that the church would continue to be obedient to God and (b) that the believers would resist all inroads by false teachers. These two objectives, of course, are inseparable.

Evidently John had encountered members of this church (**some of your children**; cf. v. 1) somewhere and was delighted (**it has given me great joy**; cf. 3 John 3-4) to observe their obedience to the truth. He used their fidelity, which he had observed, as a positive starting point. What they were doing (**walking in the truth**; cf. 3 John 3-4) was precisely what **the Father commanded**. To walk in the truth is to be obedient to the truth God has made known. John wanted the whole church to do the same. In his final reference to the church under personification (until v. 13), John enjoined it as a **dear lady**. What he wrote to the church was not some **new requirement but one** the church has **had from the beginning** (cf. v. 6). (For the same idea, see 1 John 2:7.) It is nothing other than the command **that we love one another**. As in the larger epistle, the apostle encouraged his readers to follow the old ways as he sought to help them resist the innovations of the antichrists (2 John 7). But what does it mean to “love one another”? The answer: **This is love, that we walk in obedience to His commands**. As he had also done in 1 John 5:2-3a, John defined Christian love in terms of obedience to God. A Christian who truly seeks God’s best for his brothers and sisters can only do so by obeying what God has commanded him to do. Love undirected by God’s revealed will may easily degenerate into unwise, sentimental activity. Believers who are “walking in the truth” (2 John 4), that is, living in response to what God has revealed, love each other. Brotherly love is part of the truth God has revealed and commanded. The latter part of verse 6 is difficult in the original. The NIV rendering could be essentially correct (though the words **in love** interpretively render the Gr. *en autē*, “in it”). An alternative rendering would be, “And this is the command, that you walk in it as you have heard from the beginning.” Under this construction of the text, John was affirming that obeying God’s commands meant adhering to what had been commanded in the form in which it was expressed **from the beginning**. Taken in this way, the writer’s words were designed to warn against any “reinterpretation” of God’s will, such as the antichrists might propose. The movement from the plural “commands” (v. 6a) to the singular **command** (v. 6b) is natural for this author (cf. 1 John 3:22-23). The many specifics of God’s will can be thought of as a single obligation.

Verse 7 is more closely linked in thought with verse 6 than the English rendering suggests. A Greek conjunction meaning “because” (*hoti*) has been left untranslated. The reason for John’s previous admonition is that **many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world**. As in the first epistle, the apostle expressed his concern that many false teachers had arisen (cf. 1 John 2:18; 4:1). These teachers were “deceivers” (*planoi*, “ones who lead astray”; cf. *planaō*, “lead astray,” in 1 John 2:26; 3:7). Their very number (as well as a probable variety of erroneous ideas) made them a substantial threat to Christian churches such as this one. What bound the false teachers and their views together was their unbelief and rejection of Christ’s Incarnation. The present

participle “coming” (in the phrase “coming in the flesh”) focuses on the principle involved in the Incarnation: Jesus taking on (coming in) and continuing with a human nature (cf. 1 John 4:2). This truth about “Jesus Christ... coming in the flesh” is what the deceivers denied. Some taught that Jesus’ body was not truly human; it only appeared that way. That, of course, contradicted the truth of the Incarnation, that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human (Col. 2:9). **Such** a denial marks that person as a **deceiver** as well as an **antichrist**. (See comments on 1 John 2:18). The word **the** before “deceiver” and “antichrist” could be misunderstood. The English article “a” (rather than “the”) is sometimes appropriate for rendering the Greek definite article when an unnamed individual is in view. John did not mean to say here that “any such person” is *the* unique, end-time figure known as the Antichrist. Because of the appearance of these deceivers, the readers needed to **watch out** for the disastrous spiritual effects which any compromise with their ideas could lead to. The danger is not loss of salvation, of course, but loss of reward. The NIV uses the second person verb (**you**) for all three of the statements in this verse. But “we” (following most mss.) is preferred: “that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward” (KJV). Early scribes and editors may have altered the “we” to “you” in these places to avoid the suggestion that the apostle could share in a loss of reward. But the author’s touch was both delicate and humble. He regarded himself as a co-laborer with his readers and their loss would be shared by him if they did not effectively resist false doctrine. The antichrists were a threat to the work of the Lord in which he and they were mutually engaged. It should be noted that the phrase **be rewarded fully** shows that failure by the readers would not totally deprive them of reward. God would not forget what they had done for Him (cf. Heb. 6:10). But the fullness of their reward (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11-15) was threatened by the subversion of the antichrists. The danger is now spelled out clearly. **Anyone who runs ahead** (*proagōn*; most mss. read “turns aside,” *parabainōn*) **and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God**. These words suggest strongly that the apostle was thinking here of defection from the truth by those who had once held to it. The word “continue” renders the Greek verb *menō*, familiar because of its frequent use (23 times) in 1 John in reference to the “abiding” life. A person who “does not continue” in a thing has evidently once been in it. The New Testament writers were realists about the possibility of true Christians falling prey to heresy and warned against it (cf. comments on the Book of Heb.). John had just cautioned his readers about possible loss of reward (2 John 8). They were thus now (v. 9) cautioned not to “overstep” the boundaries of sound doctrine, but to “remain” where they were, to “continue in the teaching (*didachē*; cf. v. 10) of (i.e., about) Christ.” To deviate from the truth is to leave God behind. God is not with a person who does so. What such a person does, he does without God. This, of course, does not suggest loss of salvation. Instead it points to a doctrinal deviation, with its accompanying disobedience. In contrast with the defector from the truth, **whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son**. This says that God is with those who persist in the true doctrine about Christ. (Here may also be another subtle affirmation of the deity of Christ; cf. v. 3.) But John no doubt had more in mind than mere creedal orthodoxy. He used *menō*, his characteristic word in the Johannine Epistles for the life of fellowship with the Father and Son, for the second time in verse 9. The roots of its significance in these letters are in texts such as John 8:31 and 15:1-7. For John, a person who “continues in the teaching” is one who “abides” or “makes his home” there. His connection with the truth is vital and dynamic, so he has a dynamic relationship with God whose commands he obeys (cf. John 14:21-23 for another expression of this kind of relationship). “Abiding” and obedience are inseparable in Johannine thought. But “continuing” in the truth about Jesus Christ calls for a firm response against those who have become purveyors of false doctrine. Hence John added, **If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him**. In the Greco-Roman world of John’s day, a traveling philosopher or religious teacher was a familiar phenomenon. Christian preachers also traveled and relied on local believers for support and hospitality (3 John 5-8). But the readers of 2 John were urged to be discriminating. If someone “comes” to them (the implication is “in the role of a traveling teacher”) without also bringing sound doctrine (*didachēn*), he should be refused help. The Greek verb for “bring” is *pherō* (“to carry”), which continues the travel motif. If the truth is not part of his “baggage,” he should receive no hospitality from those who are loyal to that truth. (By contrast, hospitality *is* to be shown to true believers [3 John 5, 8].) But a deceiver is not even to be given a greeting of welcome, since to do so would be to share **in his wicked** (*ponērois*, “evil”; cf. “the evil one” [*to ponēron*], 1 John 2:13-14) **work**. “Welcome him” (2 John 10-11) is literally, “Say ‘Greetings’ to him.” In Greek “greetings” here is

chairein, related to *chairō*, “to rejoice, be glad.” *Chairein* was used as a cordial address of welcome or farewell, something like “I am glad to see you” or “I wish you well” (cf. Acts 15:23; 23:26; James 1:1). To some modern minds these instructions seem unduly rigid and harsh. A great part of the problem, however, lies in the modern inclination to be highly tolerant of religious differences. One must frankly face the fact that the New Testament writers did not share this spirit of toleration. Their commitment to the truth and their consciousness of the dangers of religious error called forth many stern denunciations of false teachers. Not surprisingly, this modern age, having a diminishing sense of the dangers of heresy, has lost its convictions about the truth. But the passage ought not to be taken beyond the writer’s intent. He was thinking about false teachers actively engaged in disseminating error. In this activity they are not to be helped at all. Even a word of greeting might tend to give them a sense of acceptance that could be misconstrued. The readers were to make plain from their aloofness that they in no way condoned the activities of these men. The same must be true today. But John did not directly address the question of how efforts should be made to win such people to a recognition of the truth. Yet it is clear that any such efforts must be conducted so that they are not confused with any form of approbation.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Allan Bloom (1930-1992) wrote his bestselling book *The Closing of the American Mind* nearly 30 years ago. Some consider it to be the first intellectual broadside in the so-called culture wars that are still with us today. The book’s premise is that the modern university has rejected the concept of absolute truth, teaching instead that all truth is relative. As a result, students are taught that it is possible for our perceptions of truth to evolve and adapt to changing situations. Your truth might not be my truth, for each person is claimed to have the ability to create his or her own truth. This is sometimes called a systemic view of truth or truth within a particular system. The effect of this is to see Christian claims of truth as being true for Christians only. In this way of thinking, it is perfectly OK for Christians to believe that Jesus rose from the dead; but for atheists this is not true—it’s nonsense. The atheist system and the Christian system have different sets of truths, and it is not necessary to have agreement. Truth, according to this defective philosophy, should never be foisted upon society in an absolute sense, for individuals will not only decide for themselves what is true but will even create their own truths to suit their own lives. The Bible does not teach that truth is changing and elusive. Scripture does not simply present itself as one set of truths alongside others. The Bible authors believed they were presenting absolute truths. Our lesson text for today has a great deal to say about truth.

We have three epistles that were written by the apostle John, the former Galilean fisherman (see Mark 1:16-20). We do not know the order in which these were written; they are simply arranged by length in the New Testament. There are connections among all three as well as with the Gospel of John (and, to a lesser extent, with the book of Revelation, also written by John). Early tradition associates all five works by John with the churches in and around the great city of Ephesus, a leading metropolitan center of the Roman Empire of the first century AD. John probably wrote his letters in the AD 80s or early 90s. Therefore the recipients included the second generation of believers since Paul’s time in the area (see Acts 19). Troubling things had happened since then. Toward the end of his life, Paul wrote two letters in this regard to his younger colleague Timothy, who was in Ephesus to help the church with doctrinal and organizational matters. Thus the battle for truth was already being waged there in the AD 60s. It is after this period that Ephesus seems to have become a center for a burgeoning Christian heresy called gnosticism. This movement claimed to have special knowledge of Christ (the word *gnosis* means “knowledge”). The gnostics taught that Jesus had not been fully human but was a divine visitation of deity to earth, something like in the legends of the Greek gods. Since a nonhuman, immortal Jesus could not really die on the cross, the gnostics did not teach that Jesus’ death was an atoning sacrifice for sins. Instead, they taught that salvation came from secret knowledge, from being enlightened to esoteric truths that Jesus had taught only to the innermost circle of his disciples. Gnosticism seems not to have developed fully as a rival version of Christianity until after the end of the first century AD, but its seeds were being sown in John’s day. Thus his need to address in his letters gnostic-type falsehoods.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Basis of Truth (2 John 1:1-3)

1 The Elder, To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth,

2 because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:

3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Loving in truth (1)

Loving in truth through obedience (1 Peter 1:22-23)

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Loving in truth through actions (1 John 3:18)

18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Loving in truth through faith (Col 1:4-5)

4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel

Living in truth (2-3)

Living in truth through holding on to the word of God (John 8:31-32)

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Living in truth through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess 2:13)

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

Living in truth because no lie comes from the truth (1 John 2:21)

21 I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.

Pathway of Truth (2 John 1:4-6)

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

5 And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.

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

Walking in the truth (4)

Walking in the truth through the light in the Lord (Eph 5:8-9)

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

Walking in the truth through working together for the truth (3 John 1:8)

8 We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

Walking in the truth through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-15)

13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

Love one another (5)

Love one another as God has loved us (John 13:34)

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Love one another as a sacrifice to God (Eph 5:2)

2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Love one another through Jesus making love increase (1 Thess 3:12)

12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

Obedience to the truth (6)

Obedience to the truth by not distorting God's word (2 Cor 4:2)

2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Obedience to the truth by working together for the truth (3 John 1:8)

8 We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

Obedience to the truth by being established in the truth (2 Peter 1:12)

12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.

Peril to Truth (2 John 1:7-13)

7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

8 Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.

9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;
11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.
12 Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.
13 The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

Refusing Jesus as Christ (7-8)

Refusing Jesus by disowning Him before men (Matt 10:33)

33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

Refusing Jesus because of hardening of the heart (Eph 4:18)

18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Refusing Jesus by not being one of His sheep (John 10:26)

26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.

Disobedience to God (9-10)

Disobedience that comes from the influence of Satan (Eph 2:1-3)

2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Disobedience that will receive just punishment (Heb 2:2)

2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment,

Disobedience that keeps one from entering God's rest (Heb 4:6)

6 It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.

Fellowship with unbelievers (11)

Fellowship with unbelievers can cause loss of purity (1 Tim 5:22)

22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

Fellowship with unbelievers can cause consequences (Rev 18:4)

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues;

Fellowship with unbelievers can cause divisions and obstacles (Rom 16:17)

17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from David Guzik

“This epistle is more remarkable for the spirit of Christian love which it breathes than for anything else. It contains scarcely anything that is not found in the preceding; and out of the thirteen verses there are at least eight *which are found, either in so many words or in sentiment, precisely the same with those of the first epistle.*” (Adam Clarke)

A. Greeting.

1. (2 John 1:1-2) To **the elect lady and her children.**

THE ELDER, To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever.

a. **The Elder:** The writer of this book identifies himself as **the Elder**. Presumably, his first readers knew exactly who he was, and from the earliest times, Christians have understood this was the apostle John writing.

i. “John the apostle, who was now a very old man, generally supposed to be about ninety, and therefore uses the term presbyter or elder, not as the name of an *office*, but as designated his advanced age. He is allowed to have been the oldest of all the apostles, and to have been the only one who died a natural death.” (Clarke)

b. **To the elect lady and her children:** Perhaps this was an individual Christian woman John wanted to warn and encourage by this letter. Or, the term might be a symbolic way of addressing this particular congregation.

i. “The phrase is, however, more likely to be a personification than a person - not the church at large but some local church over which the elder’s jurisdiction was recognized, *her children* being the church’s individual members.” (Stott)

ii. “This appears to have been some noted person, whom both her singular piety, and rank in the world, made eminent, and capable of having great influence for the support of the Christian interest.” (Poole)

iii. John probably did not name himself, **the elect lady** or **her children** by name because this was written during a time of persecution. Perhaps John didn’t want to implicate anyone by name in a written letter. If the letter was intercepted and the authorities knew who it was written to by name, it might mean death for those persons.

c. **Whom I love in truth, and not only I:** Whomever **the elect lady** was, she was loved by all who **have known the truth**. If we know and love the truth, we will love those who also know and love the truth - **the truth which abides in us** also lives in others who know the truth.

i. We see John quite focused on the idea of truth, as he was in all of his writings. He used the word *truth* some thirty-seven times in his New Testament writings.

ii. This shows that what binds Christians together is not social compatibility or political compatibility or class compatibility. What binds us together is a common **truth**. This is why truth is important to Christians.

d. **Will be with us forever:** The truth does not change. The truth will be true **forever**, and we will have the truth forever in eternity. Many people today think that the truth changes from age to age and from generation to generation, but the Bible knows that the truth **will be with us forever**.

2. (2 John 1:3) John’s salutation to his readers.

Grace, mercy, *and* peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

a. **Grace, mercy, and peace:** John presents a slightly expanded version of the standard greeting in New Testament letters. He didn't just wish these for his readers; he confidently bestowed them by saying they **will be with you from God the Father**.

b. **In truth and love:** John can hardly write a verse without mentioning these two of his favorite topics. The **grace, mercy, and peace** God has for us are all given **in truth and love**. Apart from God's **truth and love**, we can never really have **grace, mercy, and peace**.

i. "What deep, sweet rhythm of meaning there is in the first three verses of this letter! One reads them over and over again. Oh, that the grace, mercy, and peace, may be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and in love." (Meyer)

c. **The Son of the Father:** "The apostle still keeps in view the *miraculous conception* of Christ; a thing which the *Gnostics* absolutely denied; a doctrine which is at the ground work of our salvation."

B. How to walk.

1. (2 John 1:4) John's joy to find they are **walking in truth**.

I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.

a. **I have rejoiced greatly:** This is a pastor's heart - to know that his people are **walking in truth**. While **truth** is not the *only* concern of a pastor, it is a great concern; and it is a great comfort for a pastor to see those he loves and cares for **walking in truth**.

i. "The *children* mentioned here may either be *her own children*, or those *members of the Church* which were under her care, or some of *both*." (Clarke)

b. **I have found some of your children walking in truth:** John rejoiced because when God's people are **walking in truth** they also abide in God. The same idea is expressed in 1 John 2:24: *Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father*. Truth is not only important for its own sake, but also our **walking in truth** shows we are walking with the Lord.

i. Trapp on the idea of **walking in the truth**: "Not taking a step or two, not breaking or leaping over the hedge to avoid a piece of foul way, but persisting in a Christian course, not starting aside to the right hand or the left."

2. (2 John 1:5) The commandment to love one another.

And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.

a. **I plead with you, lady:** John was not too proud to beg on such an important matter; not when it came to something as vital in the Christian life as the **commandment** that we must **love one another**.

b. **Not as though I wrote a new commandment:** John knew this was nothing new to his readers (he repeated the theme all through 1 John and his gospel). Yet because it was so essential, it had to be repeated and used as a reminder.

c. **That we love one another:** The integrity of our Christian life can be measured by our love for one another (as in John 13:35 and 1 John 4:20-21).

3. (2 John 1:6) Showing the love of God.

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

a. **This is love, that we walk according to His commandments:** If we love God, we will obey His commandments. We do this not because we think His commandments are heavy burdens, but because we see that they are best for us. They are guides and gifts to us from God.

b. **Walk according to His commandments:** Real love will walk this way. Perhaps John warned against those who thought the only important thing in the Christian life was a vague love that had no heart for obedience.

i. “Perhaps you fail to distinguish between love and the emotion of love. They are not the same. We may love without being directly conscious of love, or being able to estimate its strength and passion. Here is the solution to many of our questionings: They love who obey.” (Meyer)

4. (2 John 1:7-9) A warning against the presence and dangers of false teachers.

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

a. **Many deceivers have gone out into the world:** John was aware false teachers were a danger to the church in his day.

i. “The immediate problem in [2 John] is that of traveling teachers or missionaries. According to Christian ethics all who thus traveled about were to be shown hospitality by Christians in the town to which they came.” (Boice)

b. **This is a deceiver:** John mainly had in mind the danger in his own time, the danger of those who thought that the Jesus, being God, could have no *real* connection with the material world. They said that He only had an *apparent* connection with the material world.

i. To combat this, John made a plain declaration: we must **confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh**. This means Jesus came as a real man in His first coming, but also means He will come as a human being - although glorified humanity, and that added to His eternal deity - a real flesh and blood Jesus will come again to the earth.

c. **This is a deceiver and an antichrist:** Against this false idea of Jesus, John insists those **who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh** are the deceivers and in have the spirit of the **antichrist**.

i. John warned us against these antichrists in his first letter (1 John 2:18-23; 1 John 4:3). They are those who not only oppose Jesus, but also offer a substitute “Christ.”

ii. This spirit of antichrist will one day find its ultimate fulfillment in *the Antichrist*, who will lead humanity in an end-times rebellion against God.

d. **Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God:** There is nothing noble, sincere, courageous, or admirable in a *false* Jesus. To deny the Biblical Jesus is *always* to reject the Father and the Son both. John here draws a critical line of truth, over which it is heresy to *transgress*.

i. In our own day, we must deal with modern denials of the Biblical Jesus with the same passion John did in his day. Today, with our “scholarly” denials of Jesus and the historical record of the gospels, it is more important than ever to know who the true Jesus is according to the Bible and to love and serve the true Jesus.

ii. “To say *no* to God’s way of revealing himself is to say *no* to God himself, for he will not let himself be known by men except on his own terms.” (Marshall)

e. **Transgresses:** The word *transgresses* has the idea of “going beyond a boundary.” We never go “beyond” the teaching of Jesus, of who He is and what He has done for us. Any one who thinks we have or should go beyond what the Bible plainly says about Jesus *transgresses*.

i. “There is a true progress in the Christian life, but it is progress based upon a deeper knowledge of the historical, biblical Christ. Progress on any other ground may be called progress, but it is a progress that leaves God behind and is, therefore, not progress at all.” (Boice)

ii. “When the teaching of the Bible needs to be supplemented by some ‘key’ to the Bible or by some new revelation, it is a sure sign that ‘advanced’ doctrine is being put forth.” (Marshall)

f. **Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for:** To depart from the true Jesus means you put yourself in jeopardy to lose the things the apostles and other faithful saints **worked for**. This shows us that it isn't enough for us to start out right, we must finish in faith to **receive a full reward**.

5. (2 John 1:10-11) Instructions for dealing with the false teachers.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

a. **If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine:** If someone comes to us, denying the true doctrine of Jesus, and promoting a false doctrine of Jesus, John says we should give no hospitality, no aid, to the ones who promote their own false version of Jesus. To do so is to share **in his evil deeds**.

- i. "The words mean, according to the eastern use of them, 'Have no religious connection with him, nor act towards him so as to induce others to believe you acknowledge him as a brother.'" (Clarke)
- ii. "Suppose the visiting teacher claimed to be a Christian missionary or even a prophet but taught what was clearly false doctrine. Hospitality would demand that he be provided for, but to do so would seem to be participation in the spread of his false teachings. Should he be received or not?" (Boice)

b. **He who greets him:** John means **greet**s in a much more involved context than our own. In that culture, it meant to show hospitality and give aid. Yet, for the weak or unskilled believer, it is best if they do not even *greet* (in the sense of speaking to) those who promote a false Jesus (like the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses).

- i. These words sound severe, but John has not lost his love. We must consider these three points:
 - John is not talking about *all* error, but only error which *masquerades* as true Christianity.
 - John is not talking about all who *hold* the error which masquerades as true Christianity, but about those who *teach* those errors which masquerade as true Christianity.
 - John is not talking about all *teachers* who err, but those who err in the most *fundamental* truths, and those who are active in spreading those fundamental errors.

ii. This does not mean that we should have nothing to do with those who are caught by the cults. As John indicates, we should make a distinction between those who *teach* these Christ-denying doctrines (those who **bring this doctrine**) and those who merely *believe* the doctrines without trying to spread them.

c. **Do not receive him into your house nor greet him:** This may also be translated *do not receive him into the house*. John may be referring most specifically to not allowing these heretical teachers to come into **the house** where Christians met together.

- i. "Perhaps, therefore, it is not private hospitality which John is forbidding so much as an official welcome into the congregation, with the opportunity this would afford to the false teacher to propagate his errors." (Stott)
- ii. "We see how such [false] teachers were treated in the apostolic Church. They held no communion with them; afforded them no support, as *teachers*; but *did not persecute* them." (Clarke)

d. **Shares in his evil deeds:** We are defined by what we *reject* as much as by what we *accept*. In this, some are so *open minded* that they are *empty headed*. It is wise to keep an open mind on many things; but one would never keep an open mind about which poisons a person might try. You may say *yes* to all the right things; but one must also say *no* to what is false and evil. We need to become good at rejecting what should be rejected.

- i. "They were persons who claimed to be leaders; they were advanced thinkers, they were progressive. The Gnostic teachers of the time were claiming that while the gospel of the historic

Jesus might be all very well for unenlightened people, they had a profounder knowledge. Such were to receive no hospitality.” (Morgan)

ii. In the late 19th Century, the rise of theological liberalism brought forth generations of Christian pastors, leaders, and theologians who denied many of the fundamentals of Biblical Christianity. Though it was a broad and varied movement, at its root theological liberalism thought that Christianity had to re-evaluate all its doctrines in the light of modern science, philosophy, and thinking. They rejected the idea that a doctrine was true simply because the Bible taught it; it also had to be proved true by reason and experience. They believed that the Bible was not an inspired message from a real God, but the work of men who were limited by the ignorance and superstitions of their time. For them, the Bible was not either inspired or supernatural. The importance of the Bible and its message was not in its literal or historical truth, but in its changing spiritual message.

iii. Sadly, Germany took the lead in theological liberalism and German philosophers and theologians had a profound impact on British and American Christians. Men like Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and the Tübingen School of Theology, and Adolf Harnack. To promote or support these men or those who believe in or advance their Bible-denying theology is to *share in their evil deeds*.

C. Conclusion.

1. (2 John 1:12) John anticipates a future visit.

Having many things to write to you, I did not wish *to do so* with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

a. **I hope to come to you and speak face to face:** We must generally sympathize with John’s preference for personal, face to face communication rather than the writing of letters - though we are thankful for this letter.

2. (2 John 1:13) Conclusion.

The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

a. **The children of your elect sister:** Telling us that the *elect lady* (2 John 1:1) has an **elect sister**, and that they both have **children** does little to identify with certainty who John is writing to. Perhaps all it tells us is that if John used the term *elect lady* as a symbol for the church, he used it rather loosely (saying that she has a sister and children). The most likely idea is that the *elect lady* (a particular church) had an **elect sister** - other “sister” churches from which John brings a greeting.

b. **The children of your elect sister:** This last reference to the **elect sister** and her **children** remind us that though we must be on guard against false teachers, the true followers of Jesus are more than just our group. If we allow our desire to defend the truth to make us unloving and intolerant, Satan has won a great victory.

(Adapted from URL: <http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/guz/view.cgi?bk=62&ch=1>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

We live in a world of instant media saturation regarding the most trivial of things. We are given information about celebrities beyond any healthy need to know. Some of these reports are so bizarre that they strain credibility, but they are accepted as truth by fascinated fans. In politics, unsubstantiated rumors are started on blogs and sometimes repeated enough so that a lie gains credibility, becoming almost impossible to quash. These are examples of daily deceptions that we must sift through in order to protect ourselves from untruth. Whom should we believe? Whom should we trust? These are questions we should not have to ask within the church. We should have leaders who teach correct doctrine, not deceptive heresies. The church should be a place of truth, not a place for deceivers to roam freely. This is why John advises such severe tactics when it comes to those who would distort the gospel by denying Christ's true humanity, atoning death, etc. Such teachers must themselves be denied any place of influence within the church. This applies whether they are on speaking tours, writing books, or hosting television shows. May our leaders guard us from error so that our gatherings are times of joy, not dangerous indulgences of falsehood.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Christian love is built on truth (2 John 1:1 -2)
2. Great blessings await those who abide in God's truth and love (vs. 3)
3. Each generation must teach the next to walk in truth and love (vs. 4)
4. As we walk in God's truth, we will have fellowship with and love for other believers (vss. 5-6)
5. Be aware of teachers who promote false ideas about Jesus Christ, and take care not to support or promote them (vss. 7-11)
6. Joy occurs when believers have an opportunity for fellowship with one another (vss. 12-13)