

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Truth: The Boundary of Love and the Test of Loyalty

Scripture: 2 John 5–8

Code: 63-3

Second John is our study tonight. Second John, this little epistle of thirteen verses and brief ones at that. Just occupying, really, a portion of one page in all of Holy Scripture, and yet inspired by the Holy Spirit for our instruction and edification, it brings to us wondrous, wondrous blessing when we understand the glory of its message. As you know from prior studies, I've titled this little look at the epistle of 2 John, "Living in the Truth." In the first four verses, the word "truth" appears five times. Thus, we are introduced immediately to the theme of this letter.

It is about the truth. It is about loving in truth, about knowing truth, about upholding the truth, living for the sake of the truth, walking in the truth. It's about the truth. And it would be impossible, really, to overemphasize the importance of divine truth. God is the God of truth. Jesus Christ is the truth. Scripture says He is full of grace and truth. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth. The Scripture is called the Word of truth.

Believers are said to worship God in truth, to serve Him in truth, to worship Him in truth, to walk before Him in truth, to speak the truth, obey the truth, arm yourselves with the truth, battle with the truth, love the truth, guard the truth. The church, of course, is the pillar and support of the truth.

We live in a world of lies. The whole of humanity is in a thick, black, dark cloud of deception and cannot see the truth of God. Believers, on the other hand, those of us who know God live in the light of the truth. Truth characterizes us because the truth is so essential to spiritual life, so necessary for salvation, sanctification, because it is so critical to the effectiveness of our testimony. And because Scripture repeatedly warns about deception and warns about deceivers and calls for us to protect the truth passionately, we need to give great attention to the truth. We are to guard the truth. We are to uphold the truth. We are to defend the truth. And we are to proclaim the truth.

In this brief letter, the apostle John writes to an unnamed lady, the elder, John, to the chosen lady and her children, an unnamed lady, unnamed family. And the purpose is clearly to call her and all who read to live in the truth. This also, by the way, is the theme of 3 John, and when we get to 3 John, we're going to see how the truth also prevails in that second letter.

As noted in our study, the immediate reason for the letter was the invasion of false teachers into the homes of well-intentioned, hospitable believers who were not discerning. They had been told they were to love those who were in Christ, that they were to open their homes to those who represented Christ and preached Christ and traveled around as missionaries for the gospel. And so they were then vulnerable to false teachers who claimed the name of Christ but really were of antichrist, who said they represented Christ but really represented Satan. They played on their love. They played on their hospitality.

False teachers came, embedding themselves in the homes of true believers who were not discerning, and from that vantage point in the home, they began to disturb the confidences of the

believers there and then to extend that disturbing infiltration to the church of which those believers were a part, endeavoring to undermine the truth and teach their damning lies.

This letter is basically a warning about that ploy. It's a warning about that strategy. It's a warning about being loving and hospitable toward those who say they belong to Christ but not being discriminating and thus allowing into your life and into your home and into your church those who say they belong to Christ but belong to antichrist. And the only way you're going to be able to distinguish that is when you know the truth.

Truth, then, is at the basis of our fellowship. We love and demonstrate Christian hospitality to those who are truly of the truth. Truth is the basis of our fellowship. Truth is also the basis of our separation. We join with those who are in the truth, we separate from those who are outside the truth.

Now, in the opening verses, as I said, the direction of the letter is set by the five uses of the Greek word *alētheia*, which means truth. And we looked at verses 1 to 4 in our last study and titled it, "Living in the truth." All our life as believers is lived in the truth. We are saved by an understanding of the truth. We are sanctified by the truth. The only way to be saved is to come to the knowledge of the truth. The only way to be sanctified is by thy Word, thy Word is truth.

All our lives are lived in the sphere of divine truth. And we saw last time that the truth unites us, in verse 1; the truth indwells us, in verse 2; the truth blesses us, in verse 3; and the truth controls us in verse 4. Our whole existence is in the sphere of the truth. So we begin by looking at this concept of living in the truth, that's where we live.

Well, that brings us to a second and intimately related reality. We not only live in the truth, we love in the truth - we love in the truth. While we are living in the truth, there is no excuse for being so devoted to the truth as to be unloving. John is not saying here that you're supposed to become so critical and so analytical and so discerning and so skeptical that the truth literally overpowers your responsibility to love. Rather, he says, truth is always upheld in perfect balance with love.

Notice verse 5. "And now I ask you, lady, not as writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another." John wants to make it very clear that while we live in the truth, we also live in love and truth and love are in perfect balance. We do not use the truth as a way to be unloving, inhospitable, unkind, unmerciful, ungracious. Just the opposite. The truth is always held in love - purest kind of truth embraces love because love is a part of that truth.

Now let's look at verse 5 for a minute and just dig a little deeper. "And now," this is a logical link with verse 4, "Since we are united in the truth, since we are indwelt with the truth, since we are blessed by the truth, since we are controlled by the truth and now, then, I ask you, lady, not as writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we've had from the beginning, that we love one another." Part of the truth is to love one another, so if we're living in the truth, if we're indwelt by the truth, blessed by the truth, controlled by the truth, part of the truth is we love one another.

This is a command of Scripture. Loving is part of the truth. John knows that the people of the truth will not resist his request to love. So he simply says, "I ask you, lady," this is a request consistent

with living in the truth. This is a request consistent with being blessed by the truth. And this is not something new, not as writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. John says, "I'm just reiterating what you already know."

This is very important because in a moment we're going to see John calls for discrimination, he calls for a measure of skepticism, he calls for being analytical, he calls for not just accepting everybody who says they're in Christ, everybody who says they represent the gospel. But before he gets into that skeptical category here, he wants to reinforce the fact that I'm not telling you something you don't already know, this is not a new commandment, this is the one we've had from the beginning, that we love one another.

And what he means by the beginning here is the beginning of your life in Christ. You knew this from the very go. You have been called into a fellowship marked by love. We are to love one another, talking here about other believers. We are to open our hearts sacrificially to one another, to embrace them. That certainly includes hospitality along with a lot of other things.

This is an echo of what John said in 1 John 2, and I want you to turn back to 1 John 2 because here you have a more full explanation of what he means by what he says. It's almost a direct parallel, 1 John 2:7, "Beloved." In 2 John he said, "I ask you, lady," here it's directed to "beloved," the church to which he writes. I'm not writing a new commandment to you. I'm not telling you something new, but an old commandment which you've had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you have heard.

"On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you which is true in Him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. The one who says he's in the light yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now, the one who loves his brother abides in the light, and there's no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in darkness and doesn't know where he's going because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

He says, "If you're a part of the truth, if you belong to God, if you are in the light, you love your brother. And this is not a new commandment, this is an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. In fact, it's an old commandment which you heard probably before you even were converted." John, as you know, became known as the apostle of love, but he once was the son of thunder. He wanted to call down fire from heaven and incinerate a village that rejected the disciples and their Lord, Luke tells us about that in his gospel.

But he became a man of love, is known then as the apostle of love. And here John says, "I'm not writing a new commandment to you." It's the same thing exactly he said in 2 John, I'm not writing a new commandment, *kainos*, new in quality. I'm not telling you something you don't know. Doesn't mean new in time, it means new in essential character. I'm not asking you to love as if it's something brand new. This is something old, he says in verse 7, it's an old commandment which you had from the beginning and again he means there the beginning of your spiritual life.

You learned from the very outset as a Christian that you were called unto the body of Christ and you're to love one another. This is an old commandment. In fact, he repeats at the end of verse 7, "The old commandment." Not an old commandment only which you heard from the beginning of your

spiritual experience in Christ, but it's the old commandment. The Word which you have heard. You probably heard it all your life if you were raised in Judaism.

In fact - I mean look at the Old Testament. Some people would say, "Well, the Old Testament is not about love, it's about law." Do you understand what the law was? The law was nothing but a summary of love. That's right. The law is simply a summary of how to love. The Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 6:5 said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." The Old Testament in Leviticus 19:18 said, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus repeats that in Matthew 22 and says, "The first commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The second is like unto it, love your neighbor as yourself, and in this is the fulfilling of the whole law." The Ten Commandments, which is the summation of the law, are divided into two parts. The first half has to do with how you love God, the second half has to do with how you love each other. That's why Paul, in Romans 13:8 to 10, says, "Love is the fulfilling of the law."

If you love God, you're not going to take His name in vain. If you love God, you're not going to have an idol in His place. If you love God, you're going to respond to whatever it is that He asks you to do. If you love God, you're going to give Him the appropriate honor. And on the other hand, if you love others, you're not going to kill them, you're not going to covet what they possess, you're not going to lie against them. You see, all the commandments are simply ways to define how you love God, the first part of the commandments, and then how you love each other.

The message of love, then, is embedded in the Old Testament. It's all about loving God and loving each other. And so John, in 1 John chapter 2, says, "I'm not writing you something brand new when I call you to love each other. When I say that the defining mark of a true believer is that he loves his brother and the defining mark of a non-believer is that he hates his brother, this isn't anything new, you've always known, not only from the beginning of your salvation, but way back, that old commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself."

John says, "I'm not inventing something new. I'm not innovating, as the heretics always do. This is just something you've heard from the very start." And yet look at verse 8, "On the other hand," he says - this is really good - "On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you." Now, wait a minute. You can't have it both ways, John, you just said you weren't writing a new commandment, *kainos*, new in quality, and now you say "On the other hand I am writing a new commandment to you." You're saying the opposite of what you just said. How can this be? Well, John explains it.

While the command itself is old - from the beginning of your salvation, you knew you were to love each other, and even before that, the old commandment is part of the Word which you heard all your life if you were raised to understand the Old Testament. So in that sense, loving each other is not new, but in another sense, I am writing a new commandment to you and here's why. First of all, he says in verse 8, "Which is true in Him." What do you mean by that, John? I mean this: Never have you seen what love really looks like the way you now see it in Jesus Christ. God has never been a man before.

You've never had the opportunity to have such a perfect model of love. John 13, "Having loved His

own which were in the world," it says of Jesus, "He loved them unto perfection." The disciples saw what perfect love looked like. They saw the perfection of God's love for them in the incarnation and the self-emptying and the condescension of Jesus described in Philippians chapter 2, where He empties Himself and takes on the form of a man in order that He might die on a cross for the sake of those He loved.

And so while the command to love isn't new, there's a newness in its demonstration. You've never seen love like this which is true in Him. You've never seen love like you've seen it exhibited in Jesus. And, of course, these people are living around the end of the first century in the period between 90 and 95 of that first century, and they would by then had the record of the gospels, at least Matthew, Mark, and Luke for certain.

And the love of Jesus manifest through the record of His life and through the other epistles that had been written to comment on His love, and they would have seen God's love manifest. They would have seen the perfect example of love. Do you remember in the upper room in John 13, Jesus said to His disciples, "You're to love one another as I have" - what? - "loved you." And so there is a trueness in love that we've never seen.

So while the command to love isn't new, it's very old. On the other hand, there's a newness to it because it's true in Him in a way that's never been seen before. And then he adds something else. It's not only true in Him, but it's true in you. What does that mean? Well, what that means is there is not only a new understanding of love because of what you see in Christ, but there's a new understanding of love because of what the Holy Spirit is doing in you. Romans 5:5, "The love of Christ is shed abroad in our hearts." This is new.

The fruit of the Spirit is - what's the first one? Love. You now have a new comprehension of love, not only by the example of Christ, but by the indwelling of the Spirit. The work of New Covenant grace has granted to the believer the gift of the Holy Spirit. And with the coming of the Holy Spirit comes an experience and a comprehension of love heretofore not experienced, not known in that degree of fullness.

We have - listen to Philippians - listen to rather Ephesians 3, "We are able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge." It's not a new command to love, but there's a newness to it in the comprehension that we have by the example of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who grants us this love in a measure never before experienced. That's why Jesus can say you're to love the way I've loved you and I'll put my Spirit in you and His fruit will be love.

First Thessalonians, I think one of the really rich statements of the New Testament, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, "As to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write you for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another." What a statement. You don't need a lecture on love, you're taught by God to do it. That's why John can say on the one hand, it's not new; on the other hand, it is new. There's a dimension of it that's never been seen before, lived out in the example of Christ, a dimension that's never been experienced before, that love planted in you by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. You are taught of God on the inside to love.

There's a third reason why this love, though old, has a newness. First of all, it is true in Christ in a

way that it's never been. Then it is true in us in a way that it's never been. And then he adds, "Because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining." And John adds this really remarkable statement. He says, "The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining." The true light is Jesus Christ, and He has manifested His glory, the glory of His Kingdom. In a sense, you could say He's inaugurated the Kingdom of light, which for those of us who believe has dispelled the darkness. His Kingdom is light.

As you remember, light referring to spiritual life. His Kingdom is also love. His Kingdom is marked by, stamped by, characterized by light and love. In the arrival of Messiah the first time, the Kingdom was inaugurated and the light began to dispel the darkness. And so John says the darkness is passing away, present tense, *paragetai*. The long-awaited age of salvation has come. The present age is passing away, and so we live in the overlap. The darkness is still here, but the light is shining. Old Testament saints didn't have that experience.

So we're living in the overlap of the coming Kingdom and the passing darkness. We are already Kingdom citizens, are we not? We already belong to the future. We belong to heaven. We are citizens of the age to come. We are citizens of the world to come. We have been, according to Galatians 1:4, "Delivered out of this present evil age." We are now blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. And so we literally have a new way to experience spiritual reality as we begin to feel the realities of the coming glory in the Kingdom.

The old commandment to love is not new, but there is a newness to it, a newness because we see the truth of that love exhibited in Christ, because we experience the truth of that love planted in us by the Spirit, and because we live in the overlap and we are already tasting, as it were, of the powers of the age to come.

We belong to the Kingdom of God, not the kingdom of this world. We belong to Christ who gave to love the perfect manifestation. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who enables us to love in a way unknown before this wonderful gift. So love is an old command, but it's also new. For us, it literally becomes a way of life. We love one another.

Let's go back, then, to 2 John. And this is love. Verse 6. He says we love one another. It's not a new commandment, it's the one we had from the beginning of our salvation, but it has newness to it. "And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments." Let me tell you what that means, very simple. I said it already. The commandments of God are simply the manifestations and the definitions of how you love. Every command in Scripture that tells you how to honor God, every command that is directly connected to the relationship between a believer and God is an expression of love to God when obeyed.

Every command that defines how you interact with other people is simply a definition and an expression of how you love those people. That's why Paul, in Romans 13, says, "Love is the fulfilling of the whole law." I don't - I don't need a sign in my house, "Don't beat your children. Don't beat your wife." I love my children, I love my wife, that precludes the law. Love is the fulfilling of that law. I don't need signs to tell me not to mistreat people. The signs really won't do any good if I don't love those people.

When you look at all of God's law, and you sum it up - first of all in the Ten Commandments and then

the two commandments - it's about loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving others as yourself. And so he says in verse 6, "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments." As we are obedient to the Word of God and the will of God, it shows up in how we love.

All the commandments that relate to my honoring God when obeyed demonstrate my love for Him. All the commandments related to my action and interaction with others reflect my love and when obeyed demonstrate that I love them. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. There's no antinomianism here. There's no escape from obedience in love.

In fact, you can only love in the truth. And that's where we're going with this second point. We love in the truth. That is to say, our love is defined by our obedience to Scripture. And then John adds in verse 6, in his sort of inimitable way, reaffirming, reasserting, and restating his point, "This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it." How do you love as a way of life? You love in the truth. You love in the truth. You obey everything the truth says about God. You obey everything the truth says in your relationship to others and thus you love God and you love others.

It's not about sentimentality. We are to walk according to His commandments. And then he repeats it, "This is the commandment, just as you've heard from the beginning, you should walk in it." You've known this since the time of your conversion. We live according to God's truth and so we love according to God's truth.

In 1 John 5, "Whoever believes that Jesus" - verse 1 - "is the Christ is born of God. And whoever loves the Father loves the child born of the Father. By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and observe" - His what? - "His commandments." This is not about sentimentality. This is not about emotion. This is about obedience. When I am obedient to those commandments that relate to God, I'm loving God. When I'm obedient to those commandments that relate to others, I'm loving others.

Verse 3, 1 John 5, "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome." We love by being obedient, I hope you understand that point. So again I say we're not talking about some sentimentality here. In fact, in Ephesians 5:2 it says, "Walk in love as Christ also loved." How did Christ love? By being perfectly obedient to His Father. By being perfectly loving toward us to provide what we needed and offering Himself as a sacrifice for sin. So we live in the truth and we love in connection with the truth. You cannot really love someone if you set the truth aside.

No true love between Christians can be marked by sin and disobedience to the truth of God. Living in the truth encompasses loving according to the truth, which means that our love is best expressed when we obey the Word of God. All that is directed between us and Him and us and each other. I have to love you in the way the Bible defines that love, and that means that if I love you and you stumble, I'll come and pick you up.

That means if I love you and you sin, I'll come and confront you. That means if I love you and you have need, I'll come and meet that need. If I love you and you're grieving, I'll come and comfort you. If I love you and you're ignorant, I'll come and instruct you. If I love you and you're disobedient, I'll

come and correct you. Because that's what Scripture calls me to do. All the "one anothers" that are part of obedience.

Living in the truth, then, encompasses loving in the truth. And that brings us to a third principle. I hate to leave that one but I don't want to get too bogged down there. I want to give you one more. Loving in the truth demands being loyal to the truth. You can't live in the truth and you can't love in the truth if you're not loyal to the truth. And now we get down to the heart of the matter in this letter. Verses 7 and 8. Here John, who has already set limits on our loving - and the limits on our loving are set by the Scripture.

You can't say you're loving someone when you treat them sinfully or when you engage in sinful attitudes or sinful tolerances or sinful compromises with them. You can only truly love in absolute obedience to the Word of God. You must know the Word of God, then, in order to love God according to His revelation and to love each other according to His revelation. You have, then, to be loyal to the truth. You cannot live and love in the truth unless you're loyal to the truth. And here John sets some very careful limits.

Verse 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. Watch yourselves that you might not lose what we have accomplished but that you may receive a full reward." You are seriously warned. You cannot love deceivers. You cannot love antichrists. If you're going to live and love in the truth; that is, in obedience to God's commandments, since Christian love is fixed as to its definition, in the truth of Scripture, you cannot then embrace those who are against that Scripture or truth will be quickly lost.

We know that. Oh, do we know that. We've seen it in the seminaries of our nation through its history. We've seen it in the Christian colleges. We've seen it in churches and denominations how this unbiblical love, this love without truth starts to wrap up liars and deceivers and antichrists and embrace them and then the truth is lost. And many deceivers have gone out into the world.

The New Testament, of course, is full of warnings about them. I'm certain that you are very much aware of all of those warnings, and I don't need to go over all of them. There are just too many to cover them all. Jesus said, for example, in Matthew 24:24, "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I told you in advance."

False Christs, antichrists, those who oppose Christ, those who replace Christ, they're going to be all over everywhere. I told you in advance, I warn you, don't be suckered in by those who claim to belong to Christ. And again in Mark 13, to make sure we don't miss it, the same account is given. "False Christs, false prophets will arise, show signs and wonders in order if possible to lead the elect astray, take heed, behold I have told you everything in advance." Don't be stupid, don't be unwitting, don't be unwary.

First Timothy chapter 4 tells us the Spirit says in these latter times, some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits, doctrines of demons by means of the hypocrisy of liars. There are going to be liars with seducing spirits, driving them, making up demon doctrine that sounds like Christianity. People are going to pay attention to them. They're going to fall away from the faith. The

truth to them is lost. First John 4:1, "Believe not every spirit," don't accept everybody that comes along and says they represent Christ, "test the spirits to see whether they're from God because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

"By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. And every spirit that doesn't confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist of which you've heard that it is coming and now it is already in the world." You just have to be alert.

Jude, that little epistle, verse 3, "Earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints." Why? Verse 4, "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, unwitting Christians embrace them, and they turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and they deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ." Verse 11, he says, "Woe to them, they've gone the way of Cain, for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, they perished in the rebellion of Korah." He calls them hidden reefs in your love feast.

They sneak into the Christian environment, they sneak into the church, they show up in the love feast, and they're like reefs under the surface that sink the ship. "They are clouds without water, promise, promise, promise and no rain. They're carried along by winds. They're autumn trees without fruit. They're doubly dead, uprooted. Wild waves of the sea casting up their own shame like foam. Wandering stars for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever." Pretty strong language for false teachers.

Verse 16. "They are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts. They speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage. Beware of them." In 2 Peter chapter 2, the whole, entire chapter - I'm not even going to read it. It's just a complete chapter from verse 1 all the way down to verse 22 that describes these false teachers and their characteristics. Again, we are reminded, verse 13, they are stains and blemishes reveling in their deceptions as they carouse with you. They infiltrate the church. They infiltrate Christianity.

They have eyes full of adultery and they never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children. Again they follow the way of Balaam who loved the wages of unrighteousness. They are - verse 17 - springs without water, mists driven by a storm for whom the black darkness has been reserved. They speak arrogant words of vanity, enticing by fleshly desires and sensuality - so forth.

These are the false teachers. You're aware of them, they're all over the place. I'm not talking about the Buddhists and the Hindus and the non-Christian religionists, I'm talking about those who are false Christs and false prophets and false teachers within the church. Many deceivers. We're not deceived by the Buddhist theology. We're not deceived by the theology of another religion. It is the claim to belong to Christ, it is when Satan appears as an angel of light, 2 Corinthians 11, and his ministers appear as angels of light that the deception takes place.

And so John says if you're going to live in the truth and love in the truth, you have to be loyal to the truth. You can't live it and love that way unless you're loyal to it. There are many deceivers, planos, from which we get the word planet, meaning a wanderer. These pretenders to Christ are deadly. They go everywhere in the world, he says. Everywhere the gospel goes, everywhere the truth goes,

they go. Many deceivers have gone out into the world. World here simply means into the realm of human life. They go everywhere in the world where they can corrupt the gospel, everywhere they can pollute the church.

I'm telling you, everywhere the gospel has ever gone, they have gone. Everybody from the Mormons to the Roman Catholic system to the cults and all the - all of the bizarre forms of Christianity down to the current signs and wonders and supposed miracle movements. They're everywhere. Everywhere the truth goes, Satan sends them and they preach their other gospel.

And so, in defining them in verse 7, he says, "They are those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist." And I just read you that from 1 John 4:1 and 2. "Whoever denies that Jesus has come in the flesh is an antichrist."

Now, there are a number of ways to deny the gospel. You could undermine the gospel by denying salvation by faith. You could say Jesus is truly man. You could not deny that He came in the flesh and still undermine the gospel. You could undermine the gospel by denying God is a Trinity. You could deny the gospel by denying Jesus was God. You could deny the gospel by denying salvation by faith alone and making up a salvation by works. There are a number of ways you could deny the gospel.

I was sitting here in the church, I told you some years ago, with the leaders of the religion department of Brigham Young University, the Mormon leaders, the ones who are responsible for all the training of their students at BYU and are responsible for writing books on the Mormon theology. They said they wanted to meet with me for a day because they had so much in common with me. And so they came, and I enjoyed the discussion very much and my heart went out to these two very fine men.

And they said, "You know, we use your book *The Gospel According to Jesus* as a textbook at BYU." And I was so stunned, I thought to myself, "What did I leave out? Got to go back and edit that book." Are you kidding? Well, they said, "We're very, very concerned because there isn't a love for Christ and there isn't a submission to His lordship among our students. And so we found that book helpful." And so that launched our discussion. And they said, "We just came down to talk to you and ask if you'd come to BYU and speak to our students and our faculty because we feel like, you know, we have so much in common."

And so I wanted to further the discussion to point out that we actually didn't have anything in common, and by the time the discussion was over at the end of the day, I said to them, "I think we understand each other better now. You do not believe God is a Trinity; therefore, you have another God. You do not believe Jesus is God; therefore, you have another Christ. And you do not believe salvation is by grace alone; therefore, you have another gospel. We have nothing in common. We have nothing in common." Another God, another Christ, another gospel.

"Well," they said, "could we continue to dialogue?" And I said, "Of course, but my purpose is evangelistic. I want to convert you to the truth and if you want to submit to that, have at it. I'll keep it coming as long as you're interested," and I have. I don't know what to do other than to pray that the scales will come off their eyes and they will see the deception. But one thing I wanted to be certain of when they left is their Christ was not the Christ of Scripture. Their God was not the God of Scripture. And their gospel was not the gospel of Scripture.

They actually said to me, "We believe in salvation by grace." By grace. And I said, "Well, you -- need to kind of describe that for me because I know enough about Mormon theology to know that you've got to work." I said, "If I wanted to get to heaven, what do I need to do? What would I need to do?" They said, "You have to be baptized" with some baptism, some special sort of secretive baptism, join the Mormon church, and you have to have a pattern of righteous conduct in your life and then you can be saved. And I said, "That sounds an awful lot like salvation by works, not by grace."

To which they responded, "No, God is gracious enough to let you work your way to heaven." It's hard to win that argument. But if you have a wrong view of God and a wrong view of Christ, if your Christology or your theology or your gospel is distorted, you don't have the truth.

And here, in this particular case, there was a heresy confronting these people, John references it also in 1 John, in which there were some denying Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. And so in 1 John, John is very concerned about Christology, about the doctrine of Christ. In chapter 1, verse 3, he identifies Jesus Christ as the Son of God. In chapter 2, he identifies Jesus Christ as an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. In chapter 3 verse 23, "The name of the Son of God is Jesus Christ," and again he affirms that Christ is the Son of God. This is important to him.

In chapter 4, verse 15, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God." Chapter 5 down to verse 13, "These things I've written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life." And verse 20, "We know that the Son of God is come and is given us understanding in order that we might know Him who is true and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." And so John goes back in each of his chapters of his first epistle to affirm this Christology.

Even in 2 John, notice verse 3 and this benediction, "Grace, mercy, and peace be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father." You know that someone is of the Spirit of God when they confess the true Christ as revealed in Scripture, that He is God in the flesh, the God-man - fully divine, fully human.

The confession is that the Jehovah of the Old Testament in the person of the Son became incarnate in human flesh as the promised Messiah. Any denial of that is antichrist deception. Any denial of that is demonic. Anybody who says Jesus is not God or anybody who says Jesus is not God in the flesh, anybody who tampers with the biblical Christology is a heretic.

This particular heresy, a sort of a Cerinthian heresy, as its known, has been called Docetism, D-O-C-E-T-I-S-M from the Greek verb dokeō, D-O-K-E-O. Dokeō means to seem to appear - to seem to appear. And there was a philosophical idea that the Logos Spirit, the divine Spirit didn't really become a man, He just seemed to appear as a man. It was sort of a phantom Christ, a sort of visionary Christ. It was really an illusion - an illusion. This was borne out of ancient philosophical dualism.

In philosophical dualism, the viewpoint was that matter is evil and spirit is good. And the good spirit, the good Logos Spirit, the divine Spirit, could never become one with human flesh because it would then become evil, since matter is evil and spirit is good, so He simply appeared to be in the flesh, but could not take upon flesh.

By the way, that dualism was a convenient form of antinomianism. It was a convenient way to dispossess yourself of any responsibility for sin because if you believed that, you would say, "Well, my spirit is good, my body is bad. What am I going to do about my bad body? I can't help it. Don't hold me responsible. My spirit is good, my body is bad. All matter is bad. All that is flesh is bad. Nothing I can do about it." And on the basis of that, you could live any way you wanted without any culpability.

Philosophy is always a convenient ploy for sin, you know that. This is a devastating heresy, however, to say that Jesus did not come in the flesh. To say He only appeared to be a man is to say the Bible lied, is to say He was not truly born of a virgin and born in Bethlehem is to say He did not live a sinless life, fully God and fully man, is to say He could not die as a substitute for man because He wasn't man. It is to say that the Son of God was not nailed to a cross, He was only a phantom or an illusion. It is to say, then, that He could not rise from the dead. It is to undo everything - everything.

He had to be God in order to conquer death and sin; He had to be man in order to substitute for the sinner. Any tampering with gospel truth is unacceptable. In this case, calling Jesus' humanity an illusion strikes a blow at the heart of the gospel, saying Christ is not the God-man; therefore, He cannot be the substitute for sinners. Anybody who comes up with this or any other deviation from the gospel, verse 7 says, "This is the deceiver and the antichrist." Deceiver in relation to man; antichrist in relation to the Lord.

Again, 1 John chapter 2. You do remember 1 John chapter 2 has so much to say about this. Verse 18, "It is the last hour, just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen." They're all over the place - antichrists are everywhere. Verse 22 again, "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son doesn't have the Father. The one who confesses the Son has the Father also." Verse 26, he says, "I'm writing these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you."

What they said was that others said that the Spirit, the Christ's Spirit came down for a little while and settled on the man Jesus, maybe from His baptism to His cross, and then left to go away. But never did God become flesh. And so, in a sense, the false teachers have just flatly denied the faith. And then they've gone on to deceive the faithful. And so John is saying here, "Look," verse 8, "watch yourselves. You cannot love indiscriminately. You cannot embrace everybody in the name of Christ."

When I was on television with Larry King, that priest kept saying, "My Jesus loves everybody. I love everybody." Then you're a part of antichrist. You can't love like that. That is not the love of Christ. It is not indiscriminate. Watch yourselves, blepete, watch out for yourselves, you have to protect yourself in the church, be vigilant, suspicious, discerning, on guard because what is at stake is so important. "You," he says, "watch yourselves that you might not lose what we've accomplished." You're going to go spiritually backward, you're going to go in reverse.

It's like Galatians, having begun in the Spirit, are you now protected by the flesh? You started so well, who has confused you? You get sucked up in all of this and you go the wrong direction. Second Corinthians chapter 11, verse 2, "I'm jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin." Look, I brought you to Christ. And when

you finally meet Him, I want you to arrive as a pure virgin, not having committed adultery with some others.

“But I’m afraid, verse 3, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” I’m worried about you. You started well, but you’re being led astray. If one comes and preachers another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, and a different gospel which you’ve not accepted. You seem to bear this beautifully. You just roll over. I am worried about you.

This isn’t a popular thing to say, and I’m accused all the time of being unloving, narrow-minded, belligerent. When it comes to the truth, I’m all of those things and more. What else can I be? My guardianship is a stewardship given to me by God. I look at the church today and I remember the legacy of the faithful teaching of the true gospel that has been passed down purely by its protectors and its preachers through the centuries at great cost of time, energy, devotion, study, meditation, discussion, sacrifice, and even death.

And knowing the great heritage for the preservation of the gospel, it is extremely painful to me to watch self-styled, proud, false teachers, for the sake of money and self-promotion, corrupt the glorious message of the gospel and lead so-called Christians into deception and then get angry at anybody who wants to hold them to the test of the truth. Let them be angry all they want. That changes absolutely nothing. Nothing.

I stand where John stood. John had labored in this lady’s life and knew of the faith of her children and wanted to see the full fruit of that labor. And so he says in verse 8, “I’m afraid that if you don’t start being vigilant about who you love and who you let in your house and who you expose yourself to, that you might lose what we labored so hard to accomplish. You’re going to go in reverse and you’re going to undo what’s been done in terms of your spiritual development.”

Not only that, I’m concerned that you may receive a full reward. If you start going in reverse, you are not only going to lose here, but you’re going to forfeit your eternal reward. You’re going to lessen the reward. It’s as if God’s going to take away what He’s already planned to give you. You were going so well. Who led you astray? I espoused you to Christ and now you suck up anything and you roll over and receive it beautifully, another gospel, another spirit, another Jesus.

John had labored in this lady’s life. He wanted to see the full fruit of that labor. He wanted to see the truth in her life advancing in her and her children and everybody they influenced and the church, and so he put limits on her love. And then he wanted her to receive a full reward, a full misthos, pay, the full wages of service to Christ.

There’s so much in the Bible about our eternal reward, all over Scripture. The warning is if you’re not loyal to the truth, you’ll undo the work of God in your life in some ways and the work of faithful pastors and shepherds. Not only that, you will forfeit the complete eternal reward that you’re on the way to receiving. So there’s a high price to pay in time, going backwards spiritually and a high price to pay in eternity, forfeiting your eternal reward.

In Colossians 2:18, Paul accuses false teachers of defrauding you of your prize. What a statement. Defrauding you of your prize. I don’t want anything to do with false teachers. I don’t want them

undoing the work God has done. I don't want them tampering with the sanctifying process. I want to continue to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And I also don't want to give up what God has prepared to give to me from the Lord.

Colossians 3:24, "You'll receive the reward of the inheritance." I want to receive the full reward of inheritance for faithfulness. I cannot, then, love those who are deceivers. I cannot love those who are antichrists, no matter how they demand that I do that. And that has been the big cry of the false teachers for the last 20 years. You have to love us, the church has to be marked by love. We need to love everybody. And this indiscriminate love has just literally sucked them in on a sort of evangelical welcome wagon to embrace them in the church.

They will always demand to be loved. If you hear somebody demanding that you love them and not that you examine them, write it down, you're probably dealing with a false prophet. If somebody comes along and says, "You have no right to condemn what I teach. You have no right to touch the anointed. You have no right to criticize me or disagree with me. You're called to love me." Mark it down, it's a false teacher. Psalm 119:104: "From thy precepts I get understanding; therefore, I hate every false way."

From thy precepts I get understanding; therefore, I hate every false way. It's impossible not to if you understand the truth. Verse 128, "I esteem right all your precepts concerning everything. I take the Bible at face value, I hate every false way." And he repeats it again. If you love the truth, you hate every false way. This is part of that zeal, that love/hate attitude. Psalm 139:21, "Do not I hate those who hate thee, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against thee? I hate them with the utmost hatred, they have become my enemies."

And so is the call to be loyal to the truth. We cannot love the false teachers in the Christian church. We can have more tolerance for Jews and Muslims and Buddhists and Hindus than apostate, heretical, so-called Christian teachers. So we live in the truth, we love in the truth, we're loyal to the truth. And that limits our love. And the issue is - always is the truth. This is so important in a day when preaching in churches is contentless, theologically infantile, insipid, void of profound truth, built on shallow, worldly music, never deeper than the surface.

Christian doctrine is not taken seriously or even known by churchgoers. It's often mocked and resented. It is relentlessly assaulted by false teachers so that disinterest and ignorance prevail in the church. Many cannot explain what they believe. They've swapped popularity for theology. And without the truth as a foundation, the church cannot protect itself. It is infiltrated by all the false teachers who are stealing the eternal reward of true believers and sending them in a reverse direction.

They're having a field day today as church members become increasingly content with ignorance and emotional experience, unable to discern error, casual about bad theology. The truth is lost in the name of tolerance and love. Trying to be relevant, the church becomes absolutely irrelevant. Conviction disappears and with it, courage is gone and credibility is out the window. Os Guinness, in his book, says, "So-called believers become kissing Judases who pretend to embrace Jesus even as they betray Him." He's quoting Kierkegaard, the philosopher, of all people.

And so we have to be loyal to the truth. The truth moves ahead only in the hands of those who

passionately hate error.

Well, I've said enough. Let's pray.

Father, this has been such an important thing in my own heart to discharge this message tonight. Thank you for helping me to do that. Seal it to all our hearts, we pray in your Son's name, Amen.

END

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