

John's Letters: Words of Warning – 2 John 1-13 – Lesson Summary

I'm sure most of you remember some of the first warnings you were given as a child. "Look both ways before crossing the street." "Don't talk to strangers." "Chew your food 32 times before swallowing." Most importantly, "When being chased by an alligator run in a zigzag pattern." You may be thinking of others, but it's interesting that we still remember these warnings. They've stuck with us. Warnings are often given in order to provide a level of protection. When we understand this truth, we are much more likely to follow them. In 2 John, John is doing the same thing. John provides **3 warnings to the church** in order to protect them and allow them to experience the full truths of God.

I confess that there are times when I read some of the epistles and gloss over the greeting. I want to get to the "meat" but end up missing so much that the author wants to convey. John's introduction actually begins to express his first warning to the church. John refers to the word "truth" 5 times in the first 4 verses and the word "love" 5 times in the first 6 verses. In doing so, He proclaims that truth and love are inseparable. They cannot exist without the other. There is no truth without love and there is no love without truth. John's first warning is to **refrain from dividing truth and love**. The Gospel addresses both the heart and the head. Christ's love for us motivates Him to express His truth to us in His words and His actions. When He opens our eyes to His truth our love for our Savior leads to our desire to respond. Our transformed hearts obey His truth as we lovingly follow His commands. John rejoices that there are those within the church who have responded to Christ's truth and love as they lovingly follow His commands. When a church becomes imbalanced in regard to their expressions of truth or love, the Gospel isn't being properly expressed.

John's second warning is for the church to **watch for deceivers**. John defines a deceiver as one who does not confess the coming of Christ in the flesh. A denial of Christ's truth leads to lies. Deceivers deny Christ's truth and point people toward a false hope in something else. Satan did this to Adam and Eve. His interaction begins with a lie as he questions God's "command" to not eat anything from the Garden. Once Eve corrects his lie saying that God allowed them to eat anything in the Garden except the fruit from one tree, Satan attacks God's love. Satan questions God's love by suggesting that God is holding something back from Adam and Eve. As Adam and Eve begin to doubt God's love, they respond by believing Satan's lie and they fall into sin. We are no different. In the times we doubt God's love, we begin to believe lies and abandon truth. Because John understands this, he warns his church to "watch yourselves". We must watch ourselves as well.

John's final warning to the church is to **avoid those who teach wrong doctrine**. There are those who are preaching an anti-Gospel. The deceiver denies the Gospel while those teaching false doctrine add to it. The message being spread was that it was Jesus + something that provided salvation. Jesus + enlightenment. Jesus + knowledge. Jesus + works. The false doctrine being preached was that Jesus wasn't sufficient. John's warning is so strong that he instructs the church to refrain from being hospitable or even greeting such individuals. John understands how damaging a false Gospel can be to the church. As John expresses these warnings to the church, we see his heart for them. His farewell provides an even greater picture of his love as John shares that he has so much more to say but that he'd rather do it face to face.

Christ's heart is the same. Christ's love compels Him to come to us despite the brokenness of creation and our sinful hearts so that he can cleanse our sin. His love compels Him to open our eyes to truth. His love ultimately compels Him to surrender His life so that we would no longer be controlled by Satan's lies and our sin. The true Gospel is the full expression of God's love and truth that empowers us to live for His glory.

Discussion:

- 1) What do you think most churches emphasize more, truth or love? Why can an imbalance in either area be dangerous to a church?
- 2) What are some of the lies of our culture today? How have they impacted the Church and Christianity in our culture?
- 3) John's command to not receive or even greet someone who is adding to Christ's teaching seems a bit harsh and contrary to a call to love people. Why does John instruct a believer to avoid such people?