

Week 10: John and Jude: Watch Out for Deceivers

Hook

TRUE FAITH

Main Point: Beware of anyone who preaches against the Gospel of Jesus.

In your study of the Bible, you've likely come across the idea of the worship of false gods. Human beings as a whole love to put their hope in anything except for the one true God. In the 1960s, the Vanuatu tribe of the Island of Tanna began to engage in the worship of Prince Philip.¹ We might laugh when we hear it, but these people genuinely believe that Prince Philip will bring them salvation if they are devoted to him in worship. Even after his death, they continue to believe that he will return spiritually to bring them eternal life.

The movement started as the result of a heavy Christian presence on the island. Tribal elders began the religion in opposition to the changing religious tide on their island, desiring to maintain their control through this new cult. The tribe would rather believe a fully fabricated fantasy than believe the truth that brings freedom from sin and death. Human beings want to believe anything other than the truth.

Q: What other false beliefs are ridiculous?

Q: How do people come to believe incredibly outlandish things?

RECAP: Last week, we started the book of 2 John, which is so short that we will be able to cover it in two lessons:

- Part 1: vv. 1–6: Love One Another
- Part 2: vv. 7–13: Watch Out for False Teachers

Last week, we talked about John's command to love one another, and this week we'll talk about false teachers. Second John may or may not have been written to the same people as 1 John, but even if they weren't the same people, they were going through the same thing; false teachers who were trying to lead them astray from Christ. John was reminding them how to recognize false teachers among them and emphasizing the importance of keeping false teachers out of the church.

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Book

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2 John 7; 1 John 2:21–23; and 1 John 4:1–3 [Read]

Talking Point 1: False teachers are those who teach something contrary to the teachings of Christ.

Q: Why did John speak so harshly about those who deny Jesus?

Q: What does this tell us about our faith versus other religions?

In this short letter, John said the same thing he said in 1 John, but in a more condensed format, focusing on the two main points: 1) to follow God is to love and 2) to beware of false teachers. Since he was repeating these themes, it's no surprise that there are several cross references in 1 John that go into more detail about what these "antichrist" false teachers are like.

We learned in 1 John that there is a coming final Antichrist ("big A") who will oppose Jesus in the last days (Daniel 7:23–28; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12; Revelation 13:1–7), but every generation will have its own antichrists ("little A"). Any person who denies Christ as the Son of God and Lord of all creation has the spirit of the antichrist in the same way that all followers of Jesus have the Holy Spirit.²

These antichrists say that Jesus wasn't really God in the flesh. They believed He was just a human being who was a good moral teacher. If He did have some level of divinity, it was more like what happened to David or Samson, that God's Holy Spirit came upon Him at His baptism and left Him before He was crucified, because they didn't believe God could die. The incarnation – that God would become a man and then die for His people (Philippians 2:4–8) – was just too much for them to believe. If you're just thinking with human logic and wisdom, it sounds ridiculous. But to those of us who understand it by supernatural godly wisdom, it is the power of God for salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The term "anti"-Christ is intentionally oppositional. It means someone who is against Christ. John described two very distinct opposing kingdoms in our world, the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. The children of God and the children of the Devil. You are on one side or the other; there is no gray area in between: "Whoever is not with me is against me" (Luke 11:23).

John described these false teachers as "deceivers." This also is not a neutral position. They weren't just believing what they believed and leaving other people to believe what they wanted. They were intentionally lying, trying to deceive and manipulate people

into following them away from Jesus. Scripture tells us that the demons know exactly who Jesus is (Luke 4:41; James 2:19). But as His enemies, they lie to the people of the world to try to keep them from following Jesus.

John didn't sugarcoat the situation: our world is in a war between two opposing forces. Satan is fighting Jesus for the souls of humanity. He prowls around the earth like a roaring lion looking for people to devour (1 Peter 5:8). We can't think of friends and family who don't know Jesus in a neutral, innocuous way. We have to see the reality of their situation. They are in the grips of the Devil. They are not safe. They need to be snatched out of the fire (Jude 1:23).

Because of today's postmodern "live and let live" culture, too many Christians don't have the sense of urgency John, Paul, Jude and the other apostles had for sharing the Gospel with people who don't know Jesus. Our culture tells us that everyone can believe whatever they want or feel and "live their truth." It's considered offensive to tell someone that his or her beliefs are wrong or claim that your way is the right way. So, many of us look at our family and friends who don't know Jesus and think that as long as they're not hurting anyone, we should just leave them alone and let them believe what they want to believe.

But Scripture tells us there is only one truth, only one way to the Father, and anyone who doesn't go through that narrow gate will perish (Matthew 7:13–14). Standing by and letting our friends believe teaching that is anti-Christ is like standing by and watching them drown and doing nothing to save them. If we really believe that what the Bible says is true, we can't just stand by and watch them drown. We must risk offending them to try to save them.

If we really believe what the Bible says is true, we must take this more seriously. We have to feel that same sense of urgency the original apostles felt. It may feel uncomfortable in our postmodern culture. We may offend some people. We may even lose some relationships over it. But we must risk that. This is a life-or-death situation, and not just physical life or death but eternal life or death. We must take witnessing more seriously than most people in the American church do today.

Q: Be honest with yourself about your feelings about sharing the Gospel in our postmodern world. What makes it hard for you? Describe times when witnessing hasn't gone well and what you learned from that.

Q: Share times when witnessing has gone well for you and what you learned from that. What are some of the most effective things you have seen people do to share the Gospel?

2 John 8–9; John 15:1–11; and 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Abide in Christ.

Q: Why can't we bear fruit unless we remain in Christ?

Q: How will our works be revealed and rewarded in the final kingdom?

John framed this as a warning: watch yourselves. If you're not careful, you, too, could be led astray by false teachers. The warning is that we may lose our "full reward" – not salvation itself, but the full reward we may have received. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul described how our work for the kingdom will be evaluated in the Day of Judgment and how we will be rewarded (vv. 12–14). This doesn't affect our salvation. All those who put their trust in Christ can be assured of their salvation (v. 15). Either way, we will be saved, but rewards will be given according to our work.³

John encouraged his readers to "abide" or "remain" in the teaching of Christ. He again focused on this concept of fellowship with God through Christ. True faith isn't just about intellectual belief or verbal confession; it's about abiding in relationship with Jesus.

With his language, John created a contrast between those who "go on ahead" and those who "remain" with Jesus (2 John 9). These false teachers were trying to add something to the Gospel, saying the people needed to do more to really attain fellowship with God. But John reminded them of the truths of the Gospel, of what they had learned and known from the beginning. He warned them not to add to what Jesus taught them but to stick with the sound doctrine they had been taught (v. 9).⁴

This happens in our world today, too. New teachers arise who have some "new truth" or new way of looking at things that challenges the centuries-old teachings of Jesus. Just as in John's day, many false teachers have gone out into our world. Sometimes these things sound interesting because they are new or different or seem to fit better with our modern culture. But Scripture tells us to hold fast to sound doctrine, passing it down from generation to generation (Deuteronomy 6; 2 Timothy 2:2). We live in a time, like the time of the Judges, when people don't want to hear absolute truths or a universal standard for morality. They would rather just do whatever is "right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). As Paul wrote to Timothy, they want teachers who tell them what they want to hear instead of the truth (2 Timothy 4:1–5).

Paul told Timothy to watch his doctrine closely and persevere in it because some would be pulled away from the faith by the teaching of demons and liars (1 Timothy 4:1; 16). Both Paul and John painted a picture of two sides of this supernatural spiritual war between good and evil, where the Satan's side is intentionally trying to deceive believers and pull them away from Jesus. The way to combat that attack is to hold fast to the teachings of Scripture, to destroy every lofty opinion raised against the Gospel and take every thought captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). The spiritual battle starts

in our minds. This is why teaching sound doctrine is so important. If we want to be able to combat the lies of Satan, we must know the truth and know it well.

Q: Describe false teachings you have heard in our culture that tell people what they want to hear. Which messages seem to be most enticing and why?

Q: How does it make you feel to know that this is a spiritual battle of demons trying to pull people away from Jesus? How does that make you want to respond?

2 John 10–13 and Galatians 1:8–9 [Read]

Talking Point 3: We need to make it clear that we don't support false teachings.

Q: Why was John so harsh about not supporting false teachers?

John didn't sugarcoat anything. He was very clear that we are engaged in a spiritual war, and we cannot commiserate with the Enemy. We cannot let false teachers into our churches. We cannot let anyone preach or teach anything contrary to the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. There may be more minor theological issues about which believers disagree, but when it comes to the core of the Gospel, we cannot agree to disagree. If you aren't preaching the Gospel, it's not Christianity, and it doesn't belong in the Church. If you aren't preaching the Gospel, you can't call yourself a Christian, and you need to go preach somewhere else.

John's words may seem harsh, but he was dealing with a situation in which a lot of false teaching had arisen, and a lot of people were being pulled away from fellowship with God through Jesus. Paul took it so seriously that he told the Galatians that even if he himself came to them preaching a different Gospel, he should be accursed (Galatians 1:8–9). The Gospel is not only the core foundational doctrine of our faith, without which you cannot call yourself a Christian, but the Gospel is salvation. The Gospel is life. Without the Gospel, our faith means nothing.

John's warning to not welcome these false teachers into your house doesn't mean we can't be friends with unbelievers. He was referring to an ancient practice of the Church that when traveling teachers (such as Paul and Barnabas or Priscilla and Aquila) came to town, they opened their homes to them as a base of operations for their ministry.⁵ Instead, John was warning them against giving false teachers any kind of platform to share their lies. Today that may mean not only not allowing false teachers to speak at our churches but also speaking out against false teaching on social media or any other platforms we have.

False teachers are dangerous enemies who can hurt deeply the people we love. This isn't a matter to be trifled with. We must be clear that they are not on our side, and we do not agree with their teaching.

Q: How have you seen people being led astray by false teachers, either in churches or in the wider culture? How can we combat that with the truth?

Q: What kinds of platforms do you have through which you can share the truth of the Gospel and God's love and grace?

Q: How is God leading you to fight against false anti-Christ teachings in your world?

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Took

Main Point: Beware of anyone who preaches against the Gospel of Jesus.

Romans 1:18 notes, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” Whether it be a false teacher trying to teach things similar to the Gospel or whether it be a remote tribe in the South Pacific worshipping Prince Philip, it is clear that humanity has a desire to suppress the truth. The truth is that there are strong spiritual forces at work around the world, and we, as Christians, have a duty to know what we believe and stand firmly against those harmful forces through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Q: How can you ensure that you are walking in the truth that was taught by Jesus and handed down by the apostles?

Q: What dangers do we face whenever we are not firmly rooted in the truth?

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on your thoughts and feelings about the spiritual battle John described between the kingdom of God and the demons who are trying to turn people against Jesus. Be honest – does it really feel this serious to you? Do you live as if it is a serious spiritual battle every day? Why has so much of the modern American Church become complacent about this battle and sort of settled into a “live and let live” mentality about it? How would your life be different if you had the same sense of urgency the apostles had about these false teachers pulling people away from Jesus?

PRAY for the Lord to give you a deep understanding of the reality of the spiritual war going on for people’s souls. Ask Him to show you how you can fight on His side to protect people from the lies of the Enemy and bring them into the kingdom of light. Pray for our church to continue to teach sound doctrine and be a place where people are rescued from the Enemy and saved every week. Pray for all of us to be inspired and empowered to share the Gospel in every way we can in our daily lives. Pray for our whole world to have softened hearts to the true message of the Gospel.

ACT: Share the Gospel. Ask God to give you opportunities to share the Gospel this week in big and small ways with friends and loved ones or strangers. Pray for wisdom and

words to speak truth in love. Pray for the hearts of the people to be softened, to hear your desire for them to be saved, for them not hear condemnation or respond with offense.

NEXT TIME in *1–3 John and Jude*: Next week, we'll move on to 3 John, which focuses on the same things in a slightly different way:

1. Walking in truth and love
2. Combatting false teachers

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56713953>

² Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2001).

³ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, vol. 2* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985).

⁴ Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2001).

⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).