

The Books of 1, 2, and 3 John

Lesson 11: Watch Out for Deceivers -- 2 John 7-13

The same pen that just wrote so warmly about truth and love now writes a warning, and the tenderness does not soften the seriousness. “Many deceivers have gone out into the world,” John says, “those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.” The little congregation he loves is not living in a safe bubble. There are people in motion, traveling teachers, persuasive voices, who would gladly relieve them of the truth. And John loves these believers far too much to leave them unwarned.

Notice what the deceivers deny. It is the same fault line that runs through all of John’s writing: the incarnation. They will not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. They keep the religious vocabulary, perhaps, but they hollow out its center. And John gives them a blunt name. Such a one, he says, is “the deceiver and the antichrist.” Get Jesus wrong at this point, and everything that looks spiritual on the surface is, underneath, a denial of the faith.

So John tells the church to be vigilant in two directions. Watch yourselves, he says, that you do not lose what you have worked for, but win a full reward. And do not even welcome such teachers into your house or give them your greeting, for to do so is to share in their wicked work. To our ears this can sound harsh. But John is not forbidding kindness to outsiders; he is forbidding the church from lending its support, its platform, and its hospitality to those who are actively trying to destroy the faith from within.

And then, just as quickly, the warmth returns. John has much more to say but would rather not use paper and ink; he hopes to come and speak face to face, “so that our joy may be complete.” There it is again, that word joy. The warning was never cold. It was the protectiveness of a shepherd who longs to sit in the same room with the people he loves, in the truth they share. Guarding the truth and longing for fellowship turn out to be the same love, wearing two faces.

Group Discussion: John warns the church not to extend hospitality and support to those actively spreading a false gospel. Why is it sometimes loving, rather than unloving, to refuse to give a platform to teaching that denies the truth about Jesus?

Personal Reflection: John warns believers to watch themselves so they do not lose what they have worked for. Is there an area where you have grown careless about guarding your faith, assuming you are beyond the reach of deception or drift?

Read 2 John 7-13

Study Questions

1. John warns that “many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh” (v. 7). Why does John identify the denial of the incarnation as the mark of the deceiver and antichrist, and what does this teach about the central test of true and false teaching?
2. John says the deceivers refuse to confess Jesus as having truly come in the flesh. Where in our own day do you encounter teaching that keeps the language of faith while emptying it of the real, divine, incarnate Christ, and how prepared are you to recognize it?
3. John warns, “Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward” (v. 8). What does this teach about the possibility of losing spiritual ground, and how does it fit with the call to remain faithful to the end?
4. John calls the church to vigilant self-watchfulness. What spiritual ground have you worked hard to gain that you do not want to lose, and what would it look like to guard it more carefully?
5. John says, “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God” (v. 9). What does it mean to abide in the teaching of Christ rather than to “go on ahead” of it, and why is staying within His teaching so important?
6. John warns against the desire to “go on ahead” beyond the teaching of Christ, as if it were progress. Where are you tempted to think you have moved beyond the plain teaching of Scripture, or to prefer novel ideas to the apostolic gospel?
7. John instructs the church not to receive into their house or greet a teacher who brings a false gospel, lest they “take part in his wicked works” (vv. 10–11). How should we rightly understand this strong instruction, and what does it teach about the difference between loving outsiders and lending support to those attacking the faith?
8. John’s warning calls for both firmness toward false teaching and love toward people. Where do you struggle to hold these together, either compromising the truth to keep peace, or defending the truth in a harsh and unloving way?
9. John grounds the whole warning in the confession of Jesus come in the flesh, and ties our very having of God to abiding in the teaching of Christ (vv. 7, 9). Why is contending for the truth of the incarnation not a secondary matter but essential to genuinely having the Father and the Son, and how do we contend for it in the spirit John models?
10. Look back across this passage, where John joins a serious warning against deceivers with a longing for face-to-face fellowship and complete joy. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you, through this passage, both to guard the truth about Him and to treasure the fellowship of His people.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 7:15–20, beware of false prophets known by their fruit; Galatians 1:6–9, no other gospel, even from an angel; 1 Timothy 4:1–6, some departing from the

faith by following deceitful teaching; Titus 3:10-11, warning and then avoiding a divisive person; Jude 3, contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.