

November 29/30, 2025

Watch Yourself

Face to Face Series

2 John 1:1-13

Pastor Bryan Clark

We've been learning in our study of 1 John, that in order to flourish, to find the life your soul longs for, there has to be a high commitment to truth: to understand it, to believe it, to walk in it. It sounds straightforward enough, but at the end of John's letter he reminded us that this world lies in the power of the evil one. And Jesus described the evil one as a liar and a deceiver. The evil one has actually sent out his own missionaries, and they're coming after you to convince you of things that aren't true, to destroy your life. So, what do we do about that? Well, that's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 John. So, if you're not familiar, John wrote three letters, cleverly named 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. First John is really the bulk of the material. 2 John is very repetitive of 1 John and much shorter, and then 3 John is also much shorter. So, 2 John this weekend; 3 John next weekend.

So, one of the questions would be, "Why a second letter if it's so repetitive of the first letter? And you'll quickly see that most scholars believe John wrote all three letters toward the end of his life. It's possible by the time he's writing this, he's the last living apostle. So he sends a letter, and then he encounters some of the people from the church where he sent the letter, which raises some concerns. So he quickly writes out another letter, which he probably handed to them, and they took it back to the church and that's 2 John.

One of the questions related to the repetitive nature of it—if you really stop and think about it—things that we think are most important, we repeat over and over again. Think about as a parent with your children, there are certain things you just go over and over and over again. That's kind of where John is. He has a pretty high level of concern, and he just wants to reinforce it. But hopefully, in the process, we learn some new things. So, verse 1:

The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. (*NASB, 2 John 1-3)

So, it is likely that John, as the remaining apostle, has basically taken this nickname, this very respectful name, of being **the elder**. The role of the apostle was unique. It was a pretty significant moment when the last apostle died and the second and third generations would take it from there. So, it's likely that's what the people very respectfully refer to him as, and he just goes with that name. So he identifies himself as **the elder**. The idea of **the chosen lady and her children**, a few scholars think it is written specifically to a lady and her children. But that is, I would say, highly unlikely. I think the evidence points way more in the direction of this is just imagery, a metaphoric name for the church. Think of the church as the bride of Christ, made up of the elect of God. So **chosen lady** certainly makes sense, and then **the children** would simply be the people of that church...**whom I love in truth, not only I, but also all who know the truth**. It's pretty obvious

in that opening paragraph, there's great concern about the truth. In John's letters, 1, 2, and 3 John, he talks about the truth twenty times...just in this intro, multiple times. He taught us in 1 John that to experience this relationship with God, this relationship that our soul longs for, you have to dance with Jesus in the light, which requires a high commitment to truth. So that's going to be the repetitive emphasis here.

We talked about this in 1 John, but just to say it again, the best way to think about truth is that which aligns with reality. The truth is true whether you know it, whether you understand it, whether you believe it, it's still there and it's still true. It's reality. There is no such thing as *your* truth and *my* truth, or just somebody's opinions. There can't be different truth statements that are all true if they contradict one another. Truth, by its very nature, is exclusive. If there's something that's true, then anything contrary is untrue. It's just the nature of truth.

So, you notice John says that ***we will abide in this truth forever***. The idea is truth aligns with reality, and that will be reality forever. It's not true today and untrue tomorrow. So this is truth we can build our lives on. Verse 3 is just kind of a common greeting, which gets us to verse 4 where he starts to get into the meat of the conversation.

I was very glad to find *some* of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment *to do* from the Father. Now I ask you, lady, not as though I *were* writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. (Vs. 4-5)

So verse 4 is referring to John having encountered some of the people from the church. For whatever reason, they met somewhere, and this is probably where John gets his information that creates concern, that motivates him to write a follow-up letter.

Now the language in verse 4 could go two ways. "I met *some* of you, and it's good to see they're walking in the truth." That may be what he's saying. It could also be, "I met some of you, and what I heard from them is *some of you* are still walking in the truth," implying some are not. That's probably the most likely, which creates the motivation for the follow-up letter because it raises his concern.

Then he talks about this commandment that we talked a lot about in 1 John. I'm not going to go back over all that, but the idea is to love God, and then to love one another. It's the natural outflow. But he has continually reminded them this isn't new. He's trying to combat the idea of the false teachers who constantly had something new...some enlightenment...some new information. That was their whole message. So, John is trying to stay away from that by saying, "What I'm telling you isn't new. It's been part of the story from the beginning, because God is love. It's who God is." So, the story has always been to love God and **love one another**.

Jesus identified a new commandment, simply identifying it as a result of the New Covenant, we could love in a way that was not possible before. It's better to live out the old commandment, to love one another. But we're still left with trying to understand, "What does that mean?" This gets us to verse 6, which I think is very important,

And this is love, (So, he's going to define it for us.) that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.

Now this is very consistent with what we learned in 1 John, that we are to love God, and the natural outflow of that is to love one another...*to fulfill the commandment*. But John went on to tell us that the best way to love one another is to love God and obey his commandments because His commandments are not burdensome. We've talked about this. His commands are not just rules and restrictions. It's like a road map to flourishing. It's the way to the life your soul longs for. Therefore, the best way I could love the people around me is to love God and obey his commandments, so that I might flourish in such a way that it influences their desire to flourish, that they too might flourish.

The reason that's so important is because of the challenge these days of this idea that what it means to be a Christian is just to love other people. We don't need to get all hung up on what the Bible says. We don't need to really worry all that much about following His commandments because what it means to be a Christian is just to love other people, and what's typically meant by that is an acceptance and even an affirmation, not only of the person, but their lifestyle. And if you challenge that, you're very unloving. It's really important to understand John absolutely rejects that definition of love. It simply is not biblical love. The best way I can love the people around me is to love God and obey His commandments, so they flourish and that hopefully influences them to also obey His commandments. To encourage people down a path that is not only ultimately destructive, but deeply offensive to God, is not loving at all. It's actually a very unloving thing to do. We simply don't care enough to tell the truth. It's rather a form of indifference than actual love. So that's what he's telling us. In verse 6 he's reminding us that the way we love one another is to obey his commandments.

Verse 7: Here's the issue:

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.

The word **For** that opens verse 7 could just as easily be translated ***Because***. This isn't really a new paragraph; it's a continuation of the conversation. The reason it's so important to take truth seriously is because the **deceiver**, the liar, has sent out missionaries to deceive you. We learned this in 1 John, chapter 4, verse 1, with almost identical language. I think the best way to understand this is to think back to the Great Commission. Jesus, with His disciples, sends them out into the world to be proclaimers of the good news of the gospel. This is almost identical language, only it's the **deceiver**; it's the evil one. He, too, has his disciples. He, too, has his missionaries. They, too, are being sent out into the world. They are coming after you with the intent to deceive you, in order to destroy your life. I think the atheists are obvious. I think the secularists are obvious, but these deceivers are not so obvious. They're very good at what they do. So that's the warning John is giving us. This very specific issue he's dealing with has to do with what we refer to as the person and the work of Christ.

We've talked several times about probably what the false teaching was. We don't know that for certain, but what's relevant to us today is to understand the truth concerning Christ. You simply cannot be a Christian church if you don't get the doctrine of Christ correct. There are many wonderful churches in Lincoln, churches that we love and support. We may have differences around what we call secondary issues, things like end-times theology or sign gifts...can people speak in tongues?...or mode of baptism, or women's role in ministry...things like that. But what all of these churches hold in common are what we refer to as the core doctrines of the church, where there can be no wiggle-room. In the case of our Christology, our belief about Jesus, we believe that God sent His Son...His Son! The eternal God, Creator of the universe, to earth, to become man, to take on flesh—fully God, fully man—to live a perfect life and to die on a cross in payment for our sins, was buried, rose again and offers the salvation freely as a gift to anyone who chooses to receive it by faith. There is no wiggle-room there. That is the core of what it means to be a Christian church. Verse 8:

Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.

I think what he's referring to as a **full reward** is that you receive the flourishing, the benefit, the value, the life that your soul longs for as a result of understanding, believing and walking in the truth. So the warning at the beginning of verse eight is: **Watch yourselves**. It's a sobering thought that these missionaries of deception are coming after you. They have you in their crosshairs. Their mission is to destroy you. We can, as a church, do everything we can to teach you the truth, to disciple you, to grow you up in the truth. But what I cannot do for you is I cannot believe it for you. You have to choose to believe it. You have to make the effort to understand it, to believe it, and to walk in it. That is John's challenge. The concern he identifies is that you do not lose. **You do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.**

Here's what he is talking about. The apostles and others have worked really hard at great personal cost to take the gospel into these areas to reach people, to plant churches in these communities, so people can learn and grow and experience this life that God offers, that they might also reach others in that community. John is at the end of his life, probably the last living apostle, and what he's saying is this is transitioning to the second and third generation, and if they don't watch themselves, they're going to end up getting deceived and everything that they've worked for will be lost. It's a very sobering thought: that any local church is always one generation from extinction.

This church is 62 years old, and for 62 years there have been amazing people who have sacrificed time...they've sacrificed resources...they've sacrificed their talents. They have done so much to make what we have today possible. But it is transition time to the next younger generation, and they have the assignment to watch themselves, to guard themselves, to be as committed to truth as the previous generations have been, lest we lose all that we have worked for, for 62 years. It's the sobering message John is delivering. How does this happen? Verse 9:

Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

Once your theology of Jesus gets messed up, you have no access to God; there is no chance for flourishing. It is not true that all roads lead to God. It is not true that all religions lead to God. If you don't have Jesus, you can't get to God. That's what he just said. But when you have your theology of Jesus correct, you get the Father and the Son in this beautiful, soul-giving relationship.

What does he mean when he says **Anyone who goes too far**? An interesting phrase, and it's the only place it's used in the New Testament. It definitely has a tone of arrogance, and it carries the idea of someone who thinks they're more enlightened, that they're “in the know”, that they've got it figured out. So, think of it this way. Imagine the core beliefs of a Christian church—what we call orthodoxy—and imagine that within this circle there are churches that have differences of opinion on some of these secondary issues but are absolutely united in these core doctrines of the faith. But those that feel like they're in the know; they're enlightened; they're just a little bit smarter—these days would refer to it as progressive—eventually would reach the point where they've gone too far and are now outside the boundary of orthodoxy and cease to be a Christian church. That's what John is talking about.

Now I'm going to tell you, as someone who has done this for 40 years, there is always pressure to come up with something new...say something new...say something more enlightened...say something more clever, something more entertaining. You know, “Stop saying the same thing over and over again.” But my job is not to come up with anything new. It's just to be very clear on what is true. It's also true that no one likes to be called names. I don't like it; you don't like it. I don't like to be told I'm naïve...I'm narrow minded...I'm thoughtless...I'm unloving...I'm unkind...I'm a hater...I'm a phobic. I don't like that, and neither do you. So, sometimes, in order to accommodate the culture, people keep going a little bit farther and a little bit farther until they've gone too far and now they're outside the boundary of what it means to be a Christian church.

This is why transitions are so important. In the history of our church, in 62 years we've only fully transitioned one time. It's not like it's something we do regularly, thankfully. That's why I'm so thankful for Ryan. I know I've said this before, but I'm going to say it again. Ryan is a very smart guy. He has a wonderful theological mind. He absolutely knows how to rightly divide the word of truth. He's very good at teaching what the Bible says. I don't have the slightest concerns about Ryan. He is every bit as committed to the truth of scripture as I have been, and as Curt was before me. I can just tell you, it is not difficult to find someone to stand on this stage and entertain you and to give you a really good show, but that has never been what we're about. It's much more difficult to find someone absolutely committed to the truth of Scripture, that knows how to skillfully, rightly divide the Word of Truth. So, I'm very thankful for Ryan. My prayer is that you will be as encouraging, as faithful and as affirming to him as you have been to me, because I believe we're very fortunate to have Ryan.

He goes on in verse 10:

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

So what does that mean? Well, just to make sure we don't misunderstand this, does that mean we shouldn't have unbelievers as friends, people that believe differently than we do? The answer is, "It absolutely does not mean that!" All of us work with unbelievers. We live in the neighborhood with unbelievers. We have unbelievers at our school. By all means, we should pursue them; we should love them. We should care about them and seek opportunities to help them understand the truth that has so changed our lives. What John is saying has nothing to do with that. Here's what it does have to do with.

In the first century world there weren't hotels and motels, nice places to stay. If a town had anything, it was referred to as an Inn, and Inns were very dirty, unsafe, sinful places. Good people simply didn't go there. So, if you're going to send out these missionaries with the gospel to teach them, where are they going to stay? So, hospitality was a huge value for the first-century church. You would invite them into your home. You would house them; you would feed them; you would take care of them. But also in the process, you gave them credibility. You gave them a platform. Because of that, the people in the community would see that as an endorsement and be more likely to listen to what they have to say. This was a huge value for the first-century church.

So for John to say what he just said, tells you how serious of an issue this is. Because when the missionaries of the deceiver come to town, love does not mean you house them, you feed them, you take care of them. Love means that you do not endorse them. You do not give them a platform. You do not do anything that would tell the people in the community that this is a person you should listen to. As a matter of fact, the message should be just the opposite. This is a person who is here to deceive you and destroy your life. Therefore we're not even going to greet them, in hopes they'll pack their bags and go down the road. That's what John is saying here. So relevant to us today, in the 21st century, I am quite confident that the elders and the staff are not going to allow false teachers to stand on the stage and confuse you and to deceive you.

So where are you most vulnerable? Where you are most vulnerable—where you better watch yourselves—I think is at home. You can lock your doors; you can put bars on the window, but the false teachers are not coming through your doors. They're coming through the internet; they're coming through social media. They're coming through your television; they're coming through your radio. I am shocked by how many Christians are so diligent to protect their kids, in some cases overprotect their kids, and yet seem totally unaware of the false teachers in their home coming through the internet and through social media, television and radio to disciple their children in the lies that will destroy their lives. ***Watch Yourselves!*** The missionaries of deception are very clever. Verse 12:

Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to *do so* with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face so that your joy may be made full. The children of your chosen sister greet you.

I think it's very interesting that two thousand years ago, John said, "You know, there's more we need to talk about." You get the impression there's some really tough stuff, probably not appropriate in a letter. So, "I'm going to come visit, and we'll do this **face to face**." So here we are, two thousand years later, and the same principle is true. Sometimes we have to have difficult conversations. They are not conversations that should be had through email, that should be had

through text messages, that should be had on social media. There is no great benefit to popping off on social media. There are conversations that should take place face-to-face, eyeball-to-eyeball. The most difficult conversations still require face-to-face communication, because the goal is not simply to get something said. The goal is to get something heard, and that often requires face-to-face communication.

Ryan mentioned last week that John ends the first letter with a warning. He clearly still has concerns. Shortly after the first letter was penned, he sends out the second letter, so it's pretty obvious he's still very concerned. If the Christians don't watch themselves, they're going to end up believing things that aren't true, and everything they've worked so hard for will be lost.

It's a sobering thought that we are in a period of transition. It's not just me. There's a whole room full of people my age and older who have given an awful lot to get us to where we are today. But it's time to pass the baton; it's time for the next generation to be diligent, to guard themselves, to protect the truth, to rightly divide the Word, to be the church. Our prayer is the next generation will be true to our namesake, that we will be a people diligent to search the Scriptures, to make sure that what we're learning is true...because it's only the truth that's going to lead you to the flourishing that your soul longs for. May that be true of us.

Our Father, we're thankful this morning for Your truth. Lord, this room this morning is filled with many people who have given an awful lot of themselves to make what we do today possible. But, Lord, it's a natural thing to transition, to pass the baton to the next generation. Lord, may You raise them up to be courageous, to know the truth, to understand it and to believe it, to walk in it, that we might continue to be faithful to who you've called us to be as Your church. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988, 1995
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2025 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.