

**The Letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> John – Stick with the Basics**  
**2 John 1-13**

Brothers and sisters, speaking of children... you might be familiar with a story by Robert Munsch a popular children's author. It's about two children, Amanda and Jerimiah, and they are having a tough time on their first day of kindergarten because they both want to play with the same toys and read the same books and color with the same crayons – at the same time.

So they end up fighting and arguing, and each time the lovely kindergarten teacher must step in to remind them, in her most pleasant “sparkles and fairies and butterflies” voice that *“this is kindergarten and in kindergarten we share... we share everything!”*

So -Amanda and Jeremiah eventually decide they will practice what their teacher is teaching and they will share... everything!

So Amanda and Jerimiah switch shoes... and then shirts... and eventually their pants. When the teacher finally takes notice and exclaims *“Amanda and Jerimiah! What are you doing?!”* They reply in unison *“This is kindergarten and in kindergarten we share... we share everything!”*

Its' a classic and funny example of students applying their teacher's instructions in a way she did not intend.

A similar incident happened to me with something I said during a children's message when I was filling in on a pulpit exchange. I was preaching on Jesus' parable about salt and light in Matt 5, so I decided to also present this theme for the children's time prior the sermon as well.

I told them a funny story about how I switched the salt and sugar on April Fool's Day because I thought being able to put more sugar in my oatmeal would make it taste better - because I liked sugar better than salt. But the joke was on me because oatmeal with no salt tasted terrible! The point was that salt was more important and that learning about Jesus

and the bible in Sunday school was like getting salt to make us taste better – even though we might like sugar things, like TV video games, movies instead. Then I dismissed them off to go get “salted.”

I thought it was pretty clever, however on the Monday afterwards I received a phone call from a rather upset Sunday school supervisor who was not impressed with what I had said because a few of the older kids decided to misbehave and protest having to sit through learning in Sunday school saying they didn’t want to get “*assaulted*.”

So, applying things in ways people did not intend isn’t always cute and innocuous, sometimes even when children are involved – it can be devious and disruptive.

And the Apostle John was having also having an issue with his spiritual children applying his gospel’s emphasis on Jesus’ teachings about Holy Spirit in ways that he did not intend.

For example, in chapter 6 vs.63 John records Jesus as saying “*The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing.*” In John

14:26 Jesus says “*The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things...*” Similarly, in John 15:25 Jesus says “*The Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father— he will testify about me.*” And lastly in John 16:13-14 Jesus states that “*the Spirit of truth... will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me*”

So these teachings were being twisted and misapplied to claim that the Holy Spirit had given some believers new and more advanced insights into Jesus and who He was and His relationship to God and it was having a devious and deceptive effect on the Church.

So to correct this situation John writes three letters - 1, 2, and 3<sup>rd</sup> John, intended for the members of the particular house church congregations, which he refers to as “*children*” who are being affected by this. But, they are also addressed to the wider church as well, which these congregations belong to and John refers to the broader church as “*the lady chosen by God.*”

So these letters are John's attempts to correct the devious false teachings from misapplication and to deal with the disruptive effects it was having on his churches.

So, let's take a closer look at the problems that John is responding to, as there are all sorts of indirect references in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter which we read this morning. So, follow along in your bibles, or pull out the scripture insert from your bulletin so you can make notes as we go through this...

Now the trouble starts in vs. 4 where John writes *"It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth"*

So even though John has great joy that **some** of the children... some of the congregations... are walking in the truth, this implies that there are other congregations and or members in these congregations who are **not** walking in the truth.

And what John means by *"no longer walking in the truth"* is clarified in vs. 5. He says *"I am not writing you a new command - but one we have had from the beginning."*

John has to remind them that there is nothing new about being a Christian, belonging to the church – walking in the truth. It's the same as it always has been since the Church's beginning. They are to love one another and obey Jesus' commands. This implies that some members, some congregations, believed that being a Christian and belonging to the church had progressed since the time of Jesus and his disciples.

And we need to realize that John's gospel and letters were written about 60 to 80 years after Jesus. During that period of time some believers felt they had moved beyond the early, basic teachings, such as vs. 6 where John says *"And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love"* This is something that John received directly from Jesus, as one of Jesus' disciples

And John specifically explains why he must remind them of this in vs. 7 - *“I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world.”* In other words, those who believe they have advanced beyond such naïve and simplistic teachings, and no longer acknowledge the truth of the doctrine of the incarnation – where God becomes fully human in Jesus Christ - they have become deceivers!

And worse, these believers are going out from deceived congregations and spreading this deception instead of spreading the good news that God had become one of us! These believers are now deceivers and their false teaching prompts John to label them as antichrists!

Their so-called advanced and sophisticated and updated views about Jesus which made Him more relatable, more understandable, more acceptable and attractive to Greek and Roman perspectives was not an improvement that would actually help the cause of Christ – it was actually opposed to

Christ. The term “anti-christ” means “instead of Christ...” So even though they are talking about Christ they are proclaiming something else instead of Christ.

Now at this point you might be wondering “What’s the big deal? Why get so hung up on all that theology and doctrine about the nature of Jesus? Isn’t any talk about Jesus - good talk about Jesus? Shouldn’t we just focus on the basics instead??

Well, the big deal, in vs. 8, is *“that they will lose what they worked for.”* Think of what John had invested into teaching them the correct understanding who Jesus was. All the time and energy, the teaching and the writing, the traveling involved in circulating the gospel letter, standing up against Jewish religious authorities who said Jesus was just another revolutionary trouble-maker, a messiah wannabe... the hostility endured in gentile cities against this new religion. It was a great deal of hard work to bring people from ignorance about Jesus to a correct understanding and then persuading them to believe in Him and become disciples.

If they adopt these novel “progressive” doctrines about Jesus, all of John’s work in teaching and discipling them is lost, as will be their own efforts and struggles to learn and accept and come to faith and trust in who John has proclaimed Jesus to be.

And ultimately it also means that when they stand before God and He judges them as sinners they will no longer be trusting in Jesus to carry them through God’s judgement, they won’t even believe they need Jesus to survive that judgement, they will be facing God on their own merits; like being a good person, having worked hard, done all the right religious things, and so on...

They will be naively going up against the Almighty on their own – and they will fail miserably and God’s judgment will condemn them. Eternal destiny is at stake here brothers and sisters, and its all wrapped up in what they believed to be true about who Jesus was.

And that’s exactly why John is making a big deal about what we would call doctrine and theology - it important!

Now, ironically John doesn’t consider this important teaching to be “*doctrine and theology*” like we do – to Him it’s just the basic teaching that the church has had from its beginning – and yes we should stick to it... It’s progressing, advancing, and changing the teachings about Jesus – the “*running ahead*” that he refers to in vs. 9, which is the doctrine that needs to be avoided.

In fact, because this “*new and progressing doctrine*” has changed who Jesus is – this Jesus no longer connected people to God, and thus in vs. 10 John commands the remaining faithful congregations and faithful members to avoid anyone who is advocating and promoting this. “*do not take them into your house or welcome them!*” he says “*Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work!*”

John wants the faithful congregations and members to know that it is wicked... it is wickedness... to teach falsely about

Jesus Christ by claiming additional revelation. And it is a wicked thing to support those who deviate from the original teachings about Jesus which the Church was given at its beginnings.

This was teaching that Jesus himself had given to John and the other apostles... and then commanded them to teach, when He commissioned them make to disciples of all nations, and this is why John was very explicit in including it all through his gospel account – right from the start!

John 1:14 *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

John 5:26-27 *“For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”*

John 6:53 *“Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”*

Now I don't want to overwhelm you and give you ALL the examples in the gospel of John that emphasize Jesus came in the flesh, and came as the Messiah, and was equal to God the Father as God himself... so I'll just highlight John 6:29 as the verse which I think summarizes everything John's gospel has to say about Jesus: *“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*

And this is where the trouble that John was dealing with, brothers and sisters, becomes relevant and applicable for us as well.

Because the Gentile believers who are misapplying Jesus' teaching about the Holy Spirit from John's gospel genuinely wanted to believe in Jesus as the one God had sent. The problem was that their Greek / Roman worldview found the teaching that an Almighty Divine God would actually become

human, take on human flesh, and have a human nature and experience death on a cross to be very offensive. It was just completely counter-intuitive to everything they had ever believed about what it meant to be divine and what it meant to be human.

Yet the message of God's forgiveness was compelling, the experience of Christian community was winsome, the power and miracles of the Holy Spirit were undeniable, the willingness to suffer for this truth was convincing!

So perhaps there was a way to have the cake AND eat it too! John's gospel refers to this Holy Spirit and how He would reveal all truth, testify about Jesus, glorify Him... So maybe this whole notion of God becoming human in Jesus was just a primitive way of understanding God's actions – specifically phrased this way to accommodate those overly religious Jews who were always looking for a Messiah. They weren't as sophisticated and enlightened as Greeks and Romans who have the kind of philosophical background required to understand the nuances between divine and human, spiritual

and material. For the Jews of course Jesus had to be seen as human!

But for the Greek and Roman believers, could it not possible that the Holy Spirit was revealing more insight about Jesus which glorified Him as divine? What if this dilemma caused by what Greeks and Romans think about being divine and human is actually the means by which the Holy Spirit is showing them further insights and revealing that Jesus only appeared to be human, or just took on a human form but not actually flesh and human nature? If this was the case then they could modify the Christian faith to accommodate their core beliefs and it would solve their dilemma. They would certainly find enough material in John's gospel to misappropriate in order to make it work.

And brothers and sisters isn't that the same struggle we still have today? We find the message of God's forgiveness and love in Jesus to be compelling... the experience of Christian community is warm and welcoming, worship is inspiring, there's something greater than ourselves – a Holy Spirit and

His presence is powerful... and the commitment of those we know who follow Jesus in spite of how it makes them different from the rest of society is convincing – we want all this, we want to believe in Jesus - but... there's always a "but".

Hey this Jesus sounds pretty impressive! But... how can God be human? How can both Jesus and the Father be God? Hey this Jesus is so wonderful and accepting! But... how can He say He is the *only* way to God?? Hey this Jesus is such a great example! But... how can He ask me to leave everything and follow Him? How can he ask me to love my enemies? How can He ask me to forgive others? How can He ask me to.... you fill in the blank with whatever it is that you struggle with brothers and sisters.

But then... somehow a new divine insight is obtained, an additional divine revelation is received and it resolves the "but". So you can have Jesus and not have to worry about how He asks you to sacrifice and let go of some behavior, or belief in order to follow Him.

It might be an overly simplistic explanation, but its not incorrect to say this is how Islam began. Mohammed found many aspects of Judaism and Christianity very attractive... but... But then Mohammed has an angel visit him in the cave where he would meditate and give him additional divine revelation that become the Quran – and what do you know, in this divine revelation he discovers that while Jesus is sent from God, he's only a prophet... dilemma resolved.

It's the same situation for Mormonism. An angel directs Joseph Smith where to find gold tablets buried in a hillside in New York state that contain additional divine revelation, and it should not surprise us that in Mormon theology Jesus is considered to be divine, but He is not co-equal or of one substance with the Father. Their Jesus is not God.

And the Jehovah's Witnesses follow a similar path. Their publications teach that doctrinal changes result from progressive revelation, in which God gradually reveals his will and purpose, and that such enlightenment or "new light" results from the application of reason and study, the guidance



of the holy spirit, and direction from Jesus Christ and angels.  
And guess what... their Jesus is not God either.

But - these days... for most people, and for most of us I suspect, our butts and hang-ups about Jesus don't really have anything to do with His incarnation, or with His divine and Human natures or His trinitarian relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit. Most of us aren't actually too concerned about those important basics which John has included in his gospel and which his letter seeks to remind us of.

Instead, we bump up against what Jesus says about being the only way to God, what Jesus says about marriage, what Jesus says about being created as male and female, what Jesus says about not being able to serve both God and money, what Jesus says about loving our enemies and forgiving those who've sinned against us...

I'm sure you know where that conflict takes place for you... the point where you want to believe in Jesus, you want to follow Him, you want to obey Him but... so here's the lesson,

and the message of encouragement from 2 John for us this morning.

First, don't fall for the "divine excuses" that the devil is going to bring your way.

Brothers and sisters, 2<sup>nd</sup> John reminds us that there are no new commands in following Jesus and being His disciple and belonging to His Church. The Holy Spirit will not give you new insights and revelations that will allow you to disobey or run ahead of what Jesus has taught us from the beginning.

And you will see a lot of other believers misappropriate things Jesus taught and apply them in ways the scriptures never intended. I'm always warning you about how people twist what Jesus and the scripture teach us about love... and the big push these days is believers will claim that we've moved beyond what Jesus said about marriage. They will say the early church was primitive and they didn't have the kind of sophisticated understanding of human sexuality and gender that we are capable of today, and so the Holy Spirit is leading

us to a more advanced understanding of what it means what John says “walk in love” so we don’t have to limit marriage to just a man and a woman, we don’t have to be limited by male and female, as long as you’re loving other people.

Brothers and sisters don’t fall for that, don’t be deceived by anyone who believes this. Don’t support them and do not allow them to teach you or influence anyone else that you are responsible for. In its own way this too denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

Now unfortunately I feel like I’m always having to warn you these days about what to stay away from, what to watch out for, its starts to feel a bit like a broken record – saying it over and over again... but here’s why I have to do this brothers and sisters.

I don’t want you to lose what you worked for! I want you to be fully rewarded! You see the encouragement in 2 John is that our reward is God himself. John says in vs. 9 *“whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son”*

Brothers and sisters, its wonderful to receive grace and be forgiven, its amazing to know that we have Christ’s perfection over us that will see us through the final judgement, its beyond our imagination to comprehend what the new heavens and the new earth will be like without sin and evil and death, and it’s a relief to know that we’re not stuck with this body – we will receive glorified resurrection bodies! We receive all this brothers and sisters because Jesus has come in the flesh. But, as amazing as this all is - it can’t hold a candle... it doesn’t even begin to compare to the reward to of God Himself!

Isn’t it amazing to think about God as our reward brothers and sisters! That this divine being who is uncreated, yet has created everything... the one who has always existed, and upholds all of existence by a single word, the one who will never end... this perfect and pure and holy God gives Himself to us. We can know and delight in the one who is all-knowing and all-powerful, who is the source of all life, and light, and love and truth... the God who is good and defines what good

is... the Living God who is more beautiful in Himself than anything He has created.

Brothers and sisters, God is our reward because Jesus has come in the flesh. It's absolutely incredible and mind blowing, and I don't want you to miss out on that! I don't want you to lose what we have worked for!

Whatever it is that you struggle with having to change or let go or accept because of who Jesus is or what He says – you have to understand it can't even compare with what you are going to receive in return with God himself as your reward.

It will be totally worth it brothers and sisters to make that sacrifice and allow Jesus to change your beliefs, your behavior, your perspective that is difficult to let go of.

And, when that day finally comes where we receive God himself, its going to be unimaginable joy! Because what we've worked for, what we've sacrificed for, what we've endured and persevered for has finally arrived.

We get a small glimpse of what this is like as John closes his letter. He is eager to see the recipients of his letters face to face – so their joy may be complete as they are reunited. And we know what this is like – seeing someone again after a long time apart, it brings joy.

So multiply that a million times over brothers and sisters because one day we will see God face to face, our Lord will welcome us and say well done good and faithful servant, and we will know such joy as can never be described on this side of eternity!

So brothers and sisters, there are no new commands that we need to follow to be faithful believers. There are only the ones we have had from the beginning... Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh *“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to sacrificially love one another as he commanded us.” (1 John3:23)* Let's stick to these basics – Amen!