

Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Studies

2nd John

“Cults and False Religions”

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Bible Studies

Bible Studies
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2nd John

Introduction

Here are two words we are going to see over and over in this short letter:
truth....and.....love.

These two words are significant for every church and for every believer in the church. Without truth, and without love we have no proof of whether or not any group of people is a real church, or whether any individual is a real believer in Jesus Christ.

Think about it. There’s nothing preventing a group of people from gathering together and calling themselves a church, is there? What if that group of people really didn’t even believe Jesus was the Savior of the world? What if that group of people wanted to call themselves a church, but didn’t believe anything in the Bible was true? What would stop them from calling themselves a church? Nothing.

So how, then, do we know whether a church is really a church? Or whether a Christian is really a Christian?

Here’s how we know: **truth....and....love.**

Truth is what we find in the Bible. The Bible is absolute truth. If anyone has beliefs which don’t agree with what is in the Bible, then those beliefs are not true. All we have to do is compare all beliefs to the truth – the Bible – and we know for sure what is true and what is not.

Love is what naturally occurs when a person becomes a believer in Jesus Christ – a Christian. When a person believes in Jesus the Holy Spirit comes to live in that person’s heart. The Holy Spirit brings with Him one very powerful proof of His presence – Love. True Christians have love in their hearts for the Lord and for one another. “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

Now let’s see why the writer of this letter says about Truth, and Love....

“Cults and False Religions”
A Verse-by-Verse Study of the book of Second John

2nd John
(the whole book is only one chapter)
Questions

: 1 The Elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth,

- Who is writing this letter? He calls himself the “Elder”.
- Who is the letter written to? He calls the recipient the “lady”, and her “children”.
- How does the “Elder” feel about the “lady”?
- Who else feels that way about the “lady”?

:2 because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:

- Why do all these people love each other so much?

:3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

- What three things does the writer say the Father and the Son will give?
- John makes a very clear statement that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father. Can you guess why he might be so emphatic about this?

:4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.

- Does it sound to you like John has met these people himself, and not just heard about them?

:5 And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.

- What does John ask this small church to do?

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:6 *This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.*

- What commandment have they heard from the beginning? What is John referring to? (try John 13:34&35)
- What possible reason would there be that this church needs to be reminded of this original commandment?

:7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as coming in the flesh*. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

- What makes a person a “deceiver”?
- What makes a person an “antichrist”?
- Isn’t this pretty strong language for someone who just doesn’t agree that Jesus was Who He said He was?

:8 Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.

- What is John warning them about? What is he advising them to do?

:9 *Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.*

- What is the difference between a true Christian and a fake Christian?

:10 *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.*

- How is this church supposed to treat those who say they are Christians but are not?

:12 *Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper*

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and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. 13 The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

- John anticipates a time of great joy when he finally gets to see these people face to face. Why would this be such a time of joy?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. How does all this apply to our lives today?
2. What is a cult?
3. What is a false religion?
4. When do we love and witness to those involved in false doctrine...and when do we turn them away?

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Second John
(the whole book is only one chapter)
Discussion Notes

: 1 The Elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth,

- Who is writing this letter? He calls himself the “Elder”.
The apostle John is the writer of the letter. He also wrote I John and III John. These three letters have similarities of style and verbiage which leave little doubt that they are written by John.
- Who is the letter written to? He calls the recipient the “lady”, and her “children”.
There are differing opinions amongst Biblical scholars on this question. Some think the letter was written to a literal woman and her children – friends, perhaps, of the Apostle John. Others, myself included, think the “lady” is actually a church, and her “children” are the members of that church. I think it is possible that persecution during this time inspired John to hide the true identity of the recipients from possible spies.
- How does the “Elder” feel about the “lady”?
John has a great love for this church, which says to me they were a group he had either pastored at one time, or at least spent some time with.
- Who else feels that way about the “lady”?
As we’ll see from the end of this letter, John has a congregation with him who also send their greetings to this church. Because they have all, in both churches, known and responded to the truth, they have a natural love for one another.

:2 because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:

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- Why do all these people love each other so much?
Because of the truth which lives within them. God Himself, the Holy Spirit, lives within each believer, and that Holy Spirit feels great love for each believer, and that love becomes part of the basic make-up of each person who has the Holy Spirit living within them. That truth – that Holy Spirit – Who lives in each believer will always be in them. Forever. The love that one believer feels for another will never go away. It will always exist.

:3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

- What three things does the writer say the Father and the Son will give?
Grace. Mercy. Peace. The basic needs for spiritual life. Like food, air, water. And they are given to us from God and from His Son in truth and love.
- John makes a very clear statement that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father. Can you guess why he might be so emphatic about this?
We’re going to see this as we read further. The whole reason for writing this letter was to refute lies which were being told. Those lies mainly centered around the person of Jesus Christ. People were saying they were part of the church, but they were spreading the untruth that Jesus didn’t actually come in the flesh. That He wasn’t really the Son of God. That He didn’t actually rise from the dead. Truth was being attacked.

:4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.

- Does it sound to you like John has met these people himself, and not just heard about them?
Yes. It sounds like he has spent time with some of them. It sounds like he knows for sure that at least some of the people in this church are true believers.

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:5 *And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.*

- What does John ask this small church to do?
Interesting that he asks them to love him. Perhaps because he is about to rebuke them, warn them about something they were doing wrong...and he wants them to understand the words were being spoken in love...and he wants them to be intentional about their love for him...even though they may be hurt by the truth he is speaking to them.

:6 *This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.*

- What commandment have they heard from the beginning? What is John referring to? (try John 13:34&35)
The commandment is that they love one another.
- What possible reason would there be that this church needs to be reminded of this original commandment?
Truth is being compromised somewhere in this group of believers. And it seems that compromise of truth goes hand-in-hand with compromise of love.

:7 *For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.*

- What makes a person a “deceiver”?
If they do not believe that Jesus Christ actually came to the earth as a man. If they teach that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God. Did not die on the cross. Did not raise from the dead. Is not alive today.
- What makes a person an “antichrist”?
Same thing.
- Isn’t this pretty strong language for someone who just doesn’t agree that Jesus was Who He said He was?
Yep. But necessary. There is nothing worse in the all the world than someone who would deny the truth of who Jesus is. That truth gives hope to all people everywhere. If that truth isn’t true...life is worth

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nothing at all. Do you believe that? If you do, then you'll understand the severe warning John is about to give to his readers.

There is another point to made here, too. Some versions of this verse read: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *is coming* in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”

This particular version puts a different slant on the deceiving message which may have been communicated by these “anti-christs”. They may have been not only denying that Jesus ever came in the flesh, but also denying that He was going to literally return again. In the flesh.

(Pastor Chuck Smith, on BlueLetterBible.com, says: “A situation existed in the early church of itinerant prophets. There were men who traveled and they would come to the various churches that have been established or founded. And they would exercise to the churches their gift of prophecy, speaking through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, in the edifying of the churches, in the comforting of the saints, building up the body of Christ.

Now there were those who would come to the church claiming this gift of prophecy, claiming to be speaking in the name of the Lord who were really false prophets, and they would be giving off with their false concepts under the guise of a prophet. If someone should come in here and say, I'm a prophet of God, you know, and I have a message for the church, we'd send them to Romaine to check out the message.

But in the early church, there would be these groups, itinerant prophets who would travel around, come to the church, minister to the church. Now there came to be abuses with this. There would come those that would claim to be a prophet speaking for God and they'd say, Thus saith the Lord, Prepare a great steak dinner, mashed potatoes and green beans, you know. Or, In the name of the Lord, you know, they would -- they would say, Thus saith the Lord, you know, Take care of this man's needs. Give him money for his purse.

So it was necessary in the early church that they write some guidelines for these itinerant evangelists and prophets. And so there was a book known as the Dedike, which means the teachings of the apostles, the didactic. And this Dedike were instructions from the apostles to the various churches on how to judge a false prophet and basically, some of the rules by which they judge them. If they come in, if they came in and ministered, received them and all, accept them, and if they stayed more than three days, then they were false prophets. Started living off the people, you know.

And they did have a rule in the Dedike, it said, If they order a meal prepared in the name of the Lord, and if they eat of that meal, they're a false prophet. But if they order it prepared for the poor, and all, and don't partake, then they are to be accepted and honored. If they, in the name of the Lord, you know, order money to be given to them, they were false prophets. Now in the second epistle that John writes, he deals with the truth. Of course, both epistles are very interested in the truth. And in the first one, he deals with those false prophets and their false testimony concerning Jesus Christ.)

:8 Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.

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- What is John warning them about? What is he advising them to do? Now John begins to seriously warn this church. They are beginning to be infiltrated by people who do not walk in the truth. People who do not have love. It is time for them to “look to themselves”. Examine themselves. Honestly “judge” one another. Look at each person in their congregation and compare their beliefs to the truth....look for evidence of love.

What – Judge them? We’re never supposed to judge each other, are we? “Judge not, that ye be not judged”. Right?

“Judging” someone has more than one meaning. Are we supposed to judge (condemn) each other and come to the conclusion that someone is not worthy of forgiveness or of the love of Christ? No.

But are we supposed to judge (discern) whether or not a person is showing signs of being a true Christian, so that we can know how to effectively minister to that person....so that we can know whether or not to put that person in a position of authority in the church? Yes, of course.

John is asking this church to open their eyes. To know who is a believer in Jesus and who isn’t.

:9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

- What is the difference between a true Christian and a fake Christian? Believing in the truth about Jesus. The whole truth. He has always existed. He is God. He was promised in the Old Testament. He came to the earth as a baby. He died for our sins. He rose from the dead. He is coming back again. He is the only way of salvation for all people. Nothing we can do can save us. Only believing in Jesus. That’s the whole truth about Jesus.

Do believe that? Christian
Don’t believe that? Fake

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:10 *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; **11** for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.*

- How is this church supposed to treat those who say they are Christians but are not?
Do not give them help on their way. Do not offer to be a part of their success. Do not pray for God’s blessings on their fake ministry...their fake Christianity.

:12 *Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. **13** The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.*

- John anticipates a time of great joy when he finally gets to see these people face to face. Why would this be such a time of joy?
Because of love. Just like I look so forward to seeing my daughter who has moved to Florida. I know how it will feel to see her face, to put my arms around her, to watch her interact with her family. The joy is indescribable. Because I love her.

That’s the way John felt about these people. John’s love for them has not been compromised, because he has not compromised the truth. That’s the way all true believers feel about other true believers. That’s why it is so important to cling to the truth...and cling to love.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

5. How does all this apply to our lives today?
6. What is a cult?
7. What is a false religion?
8. When do we love and witness to those involved in false doctrine...and when do we turn them away?

The following might be a help as we think this through:

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Witnessing to a Person Involved in a Cult or False Religion

Here’s a short outline:

- **What is a cult?**
- **What is a False Religion?**
- **Is there one way to witness to anyone in any cult or false religion?**
- **What if?**

- **What is a Cult?**

A cult is any religious group calling themselves a **church** which:

does not believe that the One and Only, True God is Jesus Christ, that He actually came in the flesh, died, and was resurrected from the dead, and lives today, and is coming again someday, in the flesh.

And, usually that means they accept some other authority other than the Bible.

Here are a few of the cults you may have run into or heard about: (taken from Christiananswers.net, from an article written by Bob Pardon, Director of the New England Institute of Religious Research (NEIRR) in Lakeville, MA:

1. **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints** (Mormonism).
A very subtle, spiritual deception started in 1830 by Joseph Smith. This aggressively evangelistic group contends that it is the only true Church, and that all Christians outside Mormonism are following a deficient Gospel and a false Christ.

2. **The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society** (Jehovah's Witnesses).
Militantly anti-historic Christian tenets. This group began in the 1870s with Charles Taze Russell. They not only deny the essentials of the Christian faith, but the control exercised over the membership is highly destructive.

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3. **The Church of Scientology.**

A do-it-yourself salvation, science fiction group that masquerades as the true Church, lightly sprayed with a thin veneer of Christianity. Seeks to destroy through litigation and character assassination those who speak out against the group.

4. **The Twelve Tribes.**

This group began in the early 1970s with Elbert Eugene Spriggs. They claim that salvation can only be found by giving all possessions to them and living in their community. All personal decision-making power is given over to the leadership.

5. **The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity**
(Unification Church).

Founded in 1954 by Sun Myung Moon, this highly authoritarian and destructive group teaches that Jesus failed on the cross. Moon is now the mediator between God and man.

6. **The International Churches of Christ** (Boston Movement).

This highly evangelistic group which began in 1978 with Kip McKean embraces most of the main tenets of the historic Church. Teaches that it is the only true Church and is highly authoritarian, with immense control over members' lives.

7. **The Family** (Children of God).

This communal group was founded by David "Moses" Berg. A strange mixture of basic Christian tenets and almost total sexual license. Very controlling and manipulative.

8. **Christian Identity Movement** (Aryan Nations, Christian Identity Church, Klu Klux Klan, etc.).

A loose-knit confederation of various small groups that are militantly anti-government and conspiracy driven. Each group holds differing, deviant Christian

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tenets. All hold to Caucasians being the descendants of the ten "lost" Tribes of Israel, God's true people.

9. **United Pentecostal Church (UPC).**

A highly controlling, legalistic group that was formed in 1945. This group denies the Trinity and teaches that in order to be saved one must be baptized in the name of Jesus only. “

- **What is a False Religion?**

A false religion is any group calling themselves a **religion (but not claiming to be Christian)** which:

does not believe that the One and Only, True God is Jesus Christ, that He actually came in the flesh, died, and was resurrected from the dead, and lives today, and is coming again someday, in the flesh.

And, accept some other authority other than the Bible.

For instance:

- Judaism
- Islam (Muslims)
- Confucianism
- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Etc.

- **Is there one way to witness to anyone in any cult or false religion?**

Yes, there is. Even though each different cult or false religion has a different slant on untrue teachings, they all have one thing in common: they are depending on their own effort to be considered worthy to live eternally. In other words...they are working their way to heaven.

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Your message to them, then, is simple:

your own effort can't make you right with God.

- Talk about God, and what He is like – His Holiness, His love for mankind, His repugnance for sin, His awesome power...so great that He could make the whole world. There is no one like Him anywhere. (Genesis 1:1) (Isaiah 46:9)
- Then talk about sin and the different forms it takes, and what sin does to our ability to have a relationship with this Holy God. And what we deserve because we have sinned. (Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23)
- Then talk about the fact that there is no way for any person to “balance the scales” and somehow do enough good to make up for the bad. Won’t work.... Because even our “good” works are like filthy rags. We are bankrupt spiritually, and desperately need God to come to our rescue (Isaiah 64:6) (Ephesians 2:8,9) because there is an awful punishment waiting for us as a result of our sin.
- Then talk about the price Jesus paid on the cross for us. He became our substitute – standing in our place and taking the punishment we deserved. (Romans 5:8) (John 14:6)
- Then talk about the proper response to realizing what Jesus did for us – saying thank you to Him for loving us so much – offering our lives to Him in submission to whatever He wants. Faith. (John 3:16) (John 1:12)
- No one can, through their own effort or “goodness” ever be good enough to be in God’s presence. Only putting your faith in what God did on the cross will make you right with God.

• **What if...**

What if I get confused? What if my friend gets angry? People involved in cults are trained to debate you out of your beliefs. And people involved in false religions will be very angry at you for being so sure Jesus is God and the Bible is true. Either way, simply keep your eyes focused on one goal: sharing the scriptures which are the foundations of truth in your life.

What if my friend doesn't believe the Bible is true? If your friend puts up a roadblock by saying they don't believe the Bible is true, that is not a problem. Simply share the scriptures anyway. They are like a “sharp, two-edged sword” – and God will work in your friend's heart with the truth he/she has heard, even though they don't believe it is true.

They don't have to believe it is true before the truth begins to work on them. A sword will cut you even though you don't believe it will.

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What if someone asks a question I can't answer? Ask for the time to research a little and get back with them. Make an appointment to continue the conversation.

What if someone kicks me out of their home...or out of their life...because they are so angry with me? Go. And keep praying for them. Leave the door open for another day.

What if I can't tell the whole story before my friend makes me stop? Follow up later with a letter, e-mail or phone call and try again.

What if my friend laughs at me...or tries to ruin my reputation with others? Actually, this is a good time to smile and say, “Wow – I’m being persecuted...I’m in good company!”
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:12

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