

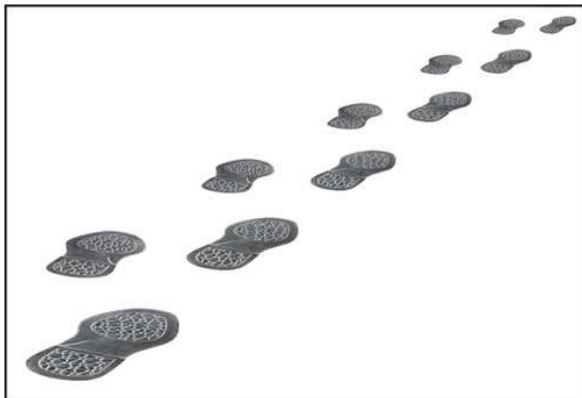
Lesson 6 (NIV)

2 JOHN 4-11**WALK IN LOVE****DEVOTIONAL READING:** John 15:12-17**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 2

Thessalonians 2:13-3:5; 2 John 4-11

2 THESSALONIANS 3:1-5

¹As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. ²And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith. ³But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. ⁴We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. ⁵May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.



⁴It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. ⁵And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. ⁶And 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.

⁷I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. ⁹Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. ¹¹Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.

KEY VERSE

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.—**2 John 6**

OUR LOVE FOR GOD

Unit II: Loving God by Trusting Christ

LESSONS 6–10

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Tell why John advised withholding hospitality from false teachers.
2. Explain what John meant by “antichrist.”
3. Express how he or she will react biblically to false teaching when confronted by it.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. False Teachers in the Church
 - B. Lesson Context: 2 Thessalonians
 - C. Lesson Context: 2 John
- I. Direct Your Hearts (2 THESSALONIANS 3:1–5)
 - A. Praying for Deliverance (vv. 1–3)
 - B. Acting with Confidence (vv. 4, 5)

- II. Walk in Truth (2 JOHN 4–6)
 - A. Basis (vv. 4, 5)
“True” Truth
 - B. Imperative (v. 6)
- III. Reject the Deceivers (2 JOHN 7–11)
 - A. What They Do Not Confess (vv. 7, 8)
The Line We Must Not Cross
 - B. What They Do Not Have (vv. 9–11)

Conclusion

- A. Doctrine and Love
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

apostasy	uh- <i>pahs</i> -tuh-see.
Colossians	Kuh- <i>losh</i> -unz.
Docetism	Doe- <i>set</i> -iz-um or Doe- <i>see</i> -tih-zum.
Ephesus	Ef-uh-sus.
Gnosticism	Nahss -tih-sizz-um or Nahss -tuh-sih-zum.
Judaizing	Joo -duh-ize-ing.
Thessalonians	<i>Thess</i> -uh- lo -nee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Thessalonica	<i>Thess</i> -uh-lo- nye -kuh (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).

Introduction

A. False Teachers in the Church

False teaching in the church is a multimillion dollar enterprise. Many organizations offer research and opinions on various Christ-claiming groups that are seen to be on the edge of orthodoxy or that have strayed into heresy. Such heresy-hunting is supported by donations, publishing, conferences, etc. These organizations perform an important service, given the seemingly endless supply of false teachers. The problem is that what one church considers heresy might be normal and central to another church's doctrine!

Since the early days of the church, accusations of false teaching have been flying. Some of the first issues, such as requiring circumcision for church membership ([Acts 15](#)), may seem irrelevant to us today. Other early issues seem very contemporary, such as the role of works in salvation and the authority of Scripture.

One of the constant threats from false teachers centered on the nature of Christ. The first-century church taught that Jesus was fully human and fully divine (as hard as that might be to comprehend). Church leaders knew that an overemphasis or underemphasis on either part of this doctrine would quickly lead to heresy. So they guarded both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus as cornerstones of the faith.

The authors of today's passages, Paul and John, both needed to deal with false teachers who denied the teaching of the apostles and threatened the church's existence. From their writings we learn ways to identify false teachers and how to deal with them.

B. Lesson Context: 2 Thessalonians

Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians from the city of Corinth in AD 52. This dating makes the letters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, likely written just a few months apart, among the earliest writings of the New Testament.

Paul had been in Thessalonica earlier, but he didn't stay long due to Jewish opposition ([Acts 17:1-10](#)). The intent of his letters was to help the infant congregation understand his teachings more accurately in his absence. The church in Thessalonica would then be more resistant to heresy.

False teachings in the first century had many faces, some more dangerous than others. One particularly dangerous heresy that threatened the church's survival was *Judaizing*. It was related to the church's emergence from Judaism and separation from the synagogue. Many early Christians were Jews, and some of them saw Christianity as the next step of the Jewish faith—a sort of super-Judaism. Such teachers believed that all

aspects of the Jewish law applied to the church, even to believers of Gentile background. This included circumcision for the males and adherence to Jewish food laws for every Christian. The error of Judaizing was a belief that salvation required keeping such laws.

C. Lesson Context: 2 John

The author given in 2 John is merely “the elder.” But the three letters of John have been attributed to John the apostle from the first century. Church tradition tells us that he had come to the city of Ephesus and lived there until his death, sometime before the end of the first century. We do not know the order in which the three letters of John were written.

This letter is addressed “to the lady chosen by God and to her children” (2 John 1). The elect lady may be a prominent woman in one of the churches in the Ephesus region, or this may be John’s figurative way of referring to the church. The letter encourages its recipients to continue living lives of love but also to be on guard against, and reject, the false teachers who have been visiting their congregation. In so doing, it touches on a then-emerging threat to the first-century church, a threat that scholars today call *Docetism*.

This threat originated with Gentiles and their Greek philosophical traditions.

The term *Docetism* comes from a Greek word that means “to seem.” The primary tenet of Docetism was that Christ’s sufferings were only apparent; they only seemed real, but were not. As one writer sums it up, Docetism maintained, against Christian affirmations to the contrary, that Christ’s existence was “mere semblance without any true reality.”

We see the apostle John explicitly declare otherwise in 1 John 4:2, 3. He knew that if this teaching prevailed, then the entire basis for the Christian message would be lost. If Jesus did not suffer, then he could not have died. As a result, there would be no death to pay for sin (contrast Philippians 2:7, 8; Hebrews 2:14; etc.). Docetism transformed into the highly destructive heresy of Gnosticism in the second century AD.

I. Direct Your Hearts (2 THESSALONIANS 3:1-5)

A. Praying for Deliverance (vv. 1-3)

1. As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you.

Paul ends the final section of 2 Thessalonians by asking for prayer, a request he also made in the first letter (1 Thessalonians 5:25; compare Colossians 4:3). Paul

saw prayer as a shared responsibility. He prayed for his friends (2 Thessalonians 1:11), and he does not hesitate to ask them to pray for him and his companions.

In this verse and the next, Paul mentions two specific areas in which he desires prayer. His first concerns *the message of the Lord*, meaning the preaching of the gospel. Paul wants his evangelistic efforts to *spread rapidly*, as they had with the Thessalonians themselves. This is not to add to Paul's reputation, but for the purpose of glorification that might come to the gospel itself, and therefore to the Lord. This is the language of worship, and Paul sees his ministry and efforts in this light, bringing glory to God (see Galatians 1:22–24).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can we be more effective in prayer for one another?

Digging Deeper

Which of the following texts convicts you most in that regard: Luke 21:36; 22:40; Romans 15:30–33; Philippians 1:9–11; 4:6; Colossians 4:12; James 5:16; 3 John 2? Why?

2. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith.

Paul's second prayer request goes to the reason his first request needs God's help: Paul knows the nature of the oppo-

sition. He had experienced it firsthand in Thessalonica (see Acts 17:5).

3. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.

Paul moves quickly from unfaithful opponents to the rock of faithfulness, *the Lord*. Whereas the opponents bedevil Paul and the Thessalonian believers, the Lord can be counted on to *protect* the readers *from the evil one*. Paul is absent and must give over his worries to his *faithful* master for preserving the Thessalonians from those who would destroy their faith.

B. Acting with Confidence (vv. 4, 5)

4. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.

Paul bases his *confidence in the Lord*, but he also has confidence in the Thessalonians. God's preserving and empowering of their congregation will result in current and future obedience to the godly teachings of Paul. Even the most challenging of Paul's congregations engendered confidence in him (see 2 Corinthians 2:3).

What Do You Think?

What are some ways we can overcome pessimism with "confidence in the Lord"?

Digging Deeper

What guardrails can we put in place to ensure that confidence doesn't become arrogance?

5a. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love

This half-verse presents us with a problem of translation. Does *God's love* mean "God's love for us" or "our love for God"? Some students propose that it's both: the more we realize God's love, the more we love him in return. Paul is encouraging devotion to the Lord, but the context leads us to understand this as also the readers' expressing love by service to other people.

5b. and Christ's perseverance.

The second part of the verse challenges us with the same problem of translation. Does *Christ's perseverance* mean "the perseverance we receive from Christ" or "the perseverance Christ himself has"? The major Bible translations differ. As above, some students propose that it's both: the more aware we become of Christ's own perseverance, the more that perseverance becomes our own.

II. Walk in Truth

(2 JOHN 4-6)

A. Basis (vv. 4, 5)

4. It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the

truth, just as the Father commanded us.

The *children* John speaks of are the children of "the lady" to whom the book is addressed (2 John 1). Whether these are a woman's physical offspring or is a figurative reference to the members of the church, they are Christians. John is joyfully encouraged because these believers have continued to walk *in the truth*. John measures this by their adherence to a *commandment*, one that has its origin with *the Father*, God himself.

"TRUE" TRUTH

Western culture has been sliding for a long time down a precipitous slope away from a belief in "true" truth—the idea that, at the very least, a few things are absolutely true. To illustrate this shift in perspective, one late-night television comedian has popularized the term *truthiness*—the belief that something is true based on perception apart from evidence or facts—in his satirical news report. It has become common these days to hear people say, in the heat of an argument, "Well, that may be true for you, but that's not *my* truth!"

That idea was illustrated anew in the 2016 presidential election campaign. The candidates, their staffs, and various political pundits had a lot to say about "fake news." Some people found it entertain-

ing, but I suspect most of us found the argument depressing. It seemed that each campaign really believed its “news” was *truer* than the “news” being quoted by the other side! The fact that both major candidates finished the race with unfavorable ratings above 50 percent may indicate how cynical Americans have become about the possibility of knowing whether *anyone* is telling the truth.

This attitude undercuts the basis on which we may build a moral society. It raises questions about whether the Bible is really true. And it certainly ends up casting unfounded doubt that the apostle John was saying anything meaningful when he told us that God wants us to be “walking in the truth” if there is no “true” truth!

—C. R. B.

5. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another.

This *command to love one another* is second only to the command to love God ([Matthew 22:35-40](#)). It is not a *new* teaching; believers have had this command *from the beginning* of their Christian walk. John does not make it complicated. This commandment was repeated by Jesus to John and the other disciples at the last supper ([John 13:34, 35](#); compare [15:12](#)). The

apostle has made this commandment a cornerstone of his teaching ministry, repeating or referring to it six times in [1 John 3:11, 23](#); [4:7, 11, 12, 21](#). John refers to this as a new/old commandment ([2:7, 8](#); see also [Leviticus 19:18](#)) in his day, and it is still a new/old commandment for us, over 1,900 years later.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can our church better demonstrate the commandment to “love one another?”

Digging Deeper

What will be your part in making this happen?

B. Imperative (v. 6)

6. 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.

Jesus taught his disciples that keeping his commandments is an expression of *love* for him ([John 15:10](#)). John narrows this to the single *command*, the old one that dates from Jesus—namely, to love one another. They *have heard* this teaching *from the beginning*, now meaning from the beginning of their relationship with John. He has always taught them to love each other. This command is not an advanced teaching, but the most basic teaching of all that undergirds the Chris-

tian life.

III. Reject the Deceivers (2 JOHN 7-11)

A. What They Do Not Confess (vv. 7, 8)

7a. I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world.

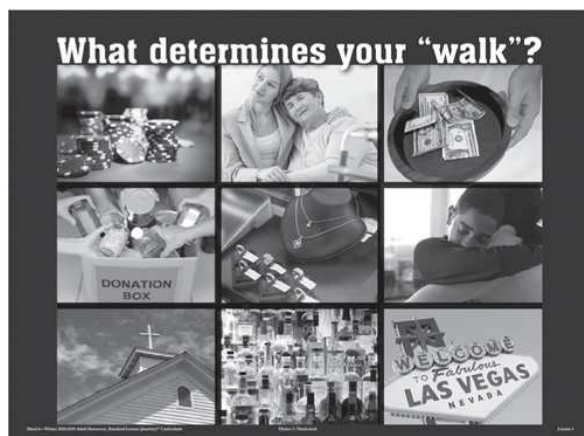
The mutual love that is so primary for John is sorely tested by false teachers, the *many deceivers*. This is not a hypothetical situation. These false teachers have *gone out into the world*, meaning they have their origin in the church (see 1 John 2:18, 19). This is the idea of apostasy—a type of heresy that implies leaving or deserting the true faith. Therefore, John has already warned his readers to walk in the truth, because their opponents do not trade in truth.

Instead of embracing truth, these false teachers *do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh*. This is a denial of the humanity of Jesus, the heresy discussed in the Lesson Context of 2 John. Denying this central teaching of the faith (the incarnation) means the deceivers must be teaching a different type of salvation, because they cannot have the doctrine of the atoning death of Jesus (see 1 John 1:7; 2:2). John will not stand for this.

7b. Any such person is the deceiver

and the antichrist.

Although the term *antichrist* is often associated with an evil personage who is to appear at the end of all things, this is not its primary meaning here. The term *antichrist* in English seems to mean “one who is against Christ,” but there is more to it in the original language. The word *anti* in Greek has the sense of “substitute” or “alternate” (example: Luke 11:11, where Greek *anti* is translated “instead”). So the idea is closer to “false Christ.” John’s idea of antichrist in this verse is something or someone in his own day who is threatening the church (see 1 John 4:3).



Visual for Lesson 6. Start a discussion by pointing to each image in turn as you ask, “What does this one say about a person’s ‘walk’?”

The “spirit of the antichrist” (again, 1 John 4:3) is not confined to a single person (2:18). John seems to dub these deceivers interchangeably as “false prophets” (4:1). Jesus warned against such counterfeits (Mark 13:22; see also 2 Peter

2:1). False teaching does not arise spontaneously; it comes from false teachers who have something to gain by their deception.

THE LINE WE MUST NOT CROSS

Christians recently observed the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. October 31, 1517, is widely held to be the day that Martin Luther nailed his *Ninety-five Theses* to the door of a church in Germany, making him a heretic in the eyes of many. His understanding of the biblical teaching on justification by faith made him unorthodox by Roman Catholic standards. Luther was a Catholic monk, but his study of the Bible had convinced him that the church had strayed from biblical truth. Luther's actions resulted in him being considered a deceiver.

The movement Luther set in motion now moves in the opposite direction in certain quarters. Recent decades have seen the creation of several denominational unions, regardless of sometimes major doctrinal differences. In some ways, this reflects culture's scorn for honest disagreement even when the issue is significant.

Yet we are still left with the apostle John's warning that we must reject deceivers. Today's lesson text places special emphasis on our teaching truth. If we stray from the Bible's teaching regard-

ing the person and work of Christ, we have crossed a line that separates us from God's truth. Do you know where that line is?

—C. R. B.

8. Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

John gives a warning to the readers, but not a dire prediction. Rather, it is an encouragement for them to stay the course and finish well (compare [2 Timothy 4:7](#)). The idea of being *rewarded* is addressed in [Matthew 10:42](#); [1 Corinthians 3:8](#); and [Hebrews 10:35](#), but not in a sense of earning salvation by works. The idea is more in line with [Luke 19:16-19](#) and [1 Corinthians 3:10-15](#). John sees his readers as partners in ministry, coworkers who are building the church through hard work. They are to take care lest they end up with less than what they or God expect.

B. What They Do Not Have (vv. 9-11)

9. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

The phrase *runs ahead* here has the sense of "going too far." In warning against going too far *in the teaching of*

Christ, John may be indicating that the false teachers present their doctrines as new and better, the next step in the evolution of the Christian message. But John demands that his people abide in the teaching of Christ to which they have been faithful in the past. This, most specifically, is the teaching about the nature of Christ himself—his full humanity and death for our sins.

To go beyond this teaching is to abandon the central promise of Christianity: forgiveness and reconciliation with God through the work of Christ. The ones who hold fast to the doctrines of incarnation and atonement retain their relationship with *the Father and the Son*, their Savior.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways our church can “contend for the faith” ([Jude 3](#)) without destroying the unity of the church in the process?

Digging Deeper

How will you determine which truths are to be contended for at the risk of offense or disunity (compare [Matthew 15:10-14](#)) and which are not (compare [Matthew 17:24-27](#))?

10, 11. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.

John ends his discussion of false teachers with a strong command, one that almost seems a contradiction with his expectation that the readers “walk in love” and “love one another.” They are not to allow the teacher who denies the incarnation even to enter one’s *house*. There is likely a double sense to this in that a “house” is not only a personal home but also the location of a church. House churches are likely the norm in John’s day. The leaders reading this letter are to offer no forum for this false teaching. To refute heresy is the responsibility of the elders of a church (see [Titus 1:9](#)).

This directive to deny access to teachers of falsehoods is accompanied by two specific qualifications. First, no one should *welcome* such teachers. This is not an invitation to be rude, but rather is a warning to extend no encouragement, food, or shelter to such teachers lest impressionable members of the church receive a mixed message about the danger the false teachers pose. Second, John warns that those who disregard the warning become, in effect, partners with the false teachers.

This is why it is so important, in any church, to have leaders who are trained in doctrine. They are the gatekeepers of the congregation. They cannot ignore this responsibility.

What Do You Think?

If a teacher of false doctrine knocked on your door tomorrow, what level of hospitality would you offer, if any, for the purpose of engaging in dialogue?

Digging Deeper

Does your decision depend on the nature of the false doctrine? Why, or why not? (Possible resources: [Romans 12:13](#); [1 Corinthians 5:9–11](#); [Hebrews 13:2](#).)

Conclusion

A. Doctrine and Love

There will always be those in the church who are looking for innovations and modifications to Bible teachings that make them uncomfortable. We sometimes must walk a tightrope between loving tolerance for such people and rigid intolerance of their false teaching.

As difficult as that may be, church leaders cannot neglect their responsibilities in this regard. When leaders allow the “love one another” mandate to suppress their duty to reject dangerous false teaching, they are not acting in love for church members as a whole—members who need the guidance of mature Christian leaders in their congregation.

B. Prayer

Lord, may we be motivated by love, not hate. May we love truth and reject falsehood. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who died for our sins. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Loving Jesus and loving truth go together.

VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 166) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Winter Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 2629119 from your supplier.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)
Student

Into the Lesson

Divide your class into two teams and say, “Some of the most memorable characters in our favorite movies are the villains. Your teams will compete to see who can best identify the movies in which these villains appeared.” Ask each team to choose spokesperson (or you can announce a rotation format so each person has an opportunity to answer without consulting team members). Decide randomly which team will go first. Villains: 1-Norman Bates (*Psycho*); 2-The Joker (*Batman*); 3-Darth Vader (*Star Wars*); 4-Wicked Witch of the West (*Wizard of Oz*); 5-Cruella de Vil (*101 Dalmatians*).

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Can You Spot a Liar?” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Give students no more than one minute to work individually, then discuss results as a class.

After either activity say, “Alfred Hitchcock said, ‘The more successful the villain, the more successful the picture.’ While that may be true for movies, encounters with ungodly people in real

life can be very painful. Both Paul and John had experience with wicked, deceiving people, and they have words of wisdom for us on how to handle them.”

Into the Word

Assign half of the class to work on [2 Thessalonians 3:1-5](#) (written by the apostle Paul) and the other half to examine [2 John 4-11](#) (written by the apostle John). If your class is large, break the halves into groups of three or four. Distribute copies of the part of the Lesson Context dealing with Judaizers to those assigned [2 Thessalonians](#); distribute the part dealing with Docetism to those assigned [2 John](#). Also give the [2 John](#) groups copies of the commentary on both halves of verse [7](#). Further, distribute handouts (you prepare) that asks groups to answer the following interview questions for either Paul or John, depending on text assigned.

Paul’s Interview: 1-Why were you able to stay only three weeks in Thessalonica? (See [Acts 17:1-10](#).) 2-What are the characteristics of the “wicked” Judaizers you have encountered? 3-Why did you ask the Thessalonian Christians to pray for you? 4-What is your prayer for the Christians there?

John’s Interview: 1-Why is love so important? 2-What teaching by the Docetic deceivers is especially harmful to the church? 3-What do you mean by the

term *antichrist*? 4-Why is it so important for Christians not to have anything to do with false teachers?

With yourself as the interviewer, rotate your questions among the groups. Have spokespersons answer as they think Paul and John would respond. Express appreciation to your class for their willingness to research their answers.

Into Life

Say, “False teaching in the first-century church by Judaizers was causing problems for Gentile believers who were falsely told that they had to obey the law to be saved. In later years, the Gnostics caused trouble for churches by teaching that Jesus wasn’t human, thereby diminishing or eliminating the importance of the incarnation and resurrection. Each era of church life has problems with false teachers. I’m going to write some topics on the board. You tell me what they might have to do with false teaching.”

Write the following, pausing to discuss each before writing the next: 1-Health and Wealth Preaching; 2-Legalism; 3-Eastern Religion Practices. For each one ask, “How would you react to the false aspects of this teaching were someone to present it to you personally?”

Option. Distribute copies of the “What’s Love Got to Do with It?” activity

from the reproducible page. This can be either an exercise for small groups or for the class as a whole.