

# Who should we listen to?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] on a Wednesday lunchtime to hear you speak and we pray that your spirit would be working in our hearts to write your words on our hearts today. Amen. Well for one week only we're going to be looking at the book of 2 John, a second letter of John. It's a fairly short letter but there's lots in it but just for this week we'll be looking at that. So let me read that for us.

It's on page 1025. 1-0-2-5.

So small it's easy to miss. Good. Well let me read that letter for us. The elder to the elect lady and her children whom I love in truth and not only I but also all who know the truth because of the truth that 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 Father's Son in truth and love.

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth just as we were commanded by the Father and now I ask you dear lady not as though I were writing you a new commandment but the one we have had from the beginning that we love one another and this is love that we walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment just as you've heard from the beginning so that you should walk in it. Four, many deceivers have gone out into the world those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves so that you may not lose what we have worked for but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teachings of Christ does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. Though I have much to write you I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face so that our joy may be complete. The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen. This is a letter written to a church who must make a choice. Perhaps you were slightly surprised when reading this letter to see the words elect lady. It's most likely that this is

John's way of referring to a particular church gathering rather than a particular woman and her family. And so this is a letter written to a church who must make a choice in the face of a very dangerous situation that's coming their way. There are teachers inbound who are on their way who are claiming to be trustworthy Christians. What they're teaching seems to be on the cutting edge of thought something exciting perhaps. But this letter then arrives ahead of them or perhaps soon after they've arrived and it carries a great warning. Not everything is as it seems with these new teachers. In fact there are odds with the apostles themselves particularly the apostle John. And so this church that John's writing to is going to have to make a choice and the choice is this. Who will they have a loving listening relationship with? Who will they listen to? Who will they faithfully love? Who will they unite and submit to? And who in the end will they end up rejecting? And that's a choice that all our churches face.

[ 4 : 0 0 ] The number of voices available to us has only increased. First with the car and easy travel and now with radio, TV and particularly now the internet. As a choice each of us face there seems to be more people wanting our money, wanting our support, wanting our ears, wanting our hearts and our discipleship.

And what we have here is a compelling letter from the apostle John for churches to make the right choice. To listen to the right people, to love, unite and submit to the teachers who will truly love you back. That's his aim. We get used to hearing that there's no right or wrong decision in many areas of life and sometimes that is true. There's no right and wrong vegetable preference that I would caution against sweet corn with all my heart. But that's not true in this case. It is absolutely not true here. Here there is a very right decision and a very wrong one. And John wants the churches to make the right choice. So let's look at the first part of this letter together. Verses one to six broadly lay out the right choice. How to identify it and why that is the right choice. And the right choice is this.

It's loving unity with the apostles and with teachers like them. The apostle John lays out in these verses at least two main characteristics of these true teachers of the right choice of people to listen to. Firstly, they teach the truth that was first delivered and they live the love that was first commanded. They abide in the true gospel as it was delivered by Jesus Christ and their love is shaped around the concerns and commands of God himself. So let's look at both of those briefly.

Firstly, the apostle and those who follow their pattern abide in the truth as delivered by Jesus from the very beginning. We're introduced to this characteristic as early as verse two.

The truth abides in the apostles and it will do forever. Right from the beginning, the apostles have equaled the true message. And notice the constant callbacks throughout the first half of this letter. Verse four, John is pleased that the believers are walking in the commands that Christ gave at the beginning, not new ones, the original ones. And in verse five, John is not giving a new commandment.

[ 6 : 32 ] He's simply repeating the one they had from the beginning that we can read about ourselves in John chapter 13. Coming from the lips of Jesus himself. And again, in verse six, John gives a commandment that is just as they've heard from the beginning. And so John is making the point, the apostles follow the truth as delivered at the start by Jesus himself. They're not innovating. They're not creating new and exciting things to teach to capture attention. Their message is the truth as revealed by God at the first. The truth is such a crucial thing.

issue here in the letter. The language is scattered throughout the whole thing. The apostles and the teachers who follow their pattern embody the truth, the real truth. Their message is not made up. It doesn't depart from the message God has revealed. It does not deviate. It does not leave behind what God has said.

The right teachers, the right teachers, the ones who this church should listen to, the ones who follow the patterns of Christ's apostles are concerned ultimately that what they teach is the truth that God has revealed. Novelty has always been tempting for people, but the right teachers do not innovate when it comes to the message they teach. What they teach is what was delivered, what was revealed by God himself.

And it has not left that behind. Well, what does that mean for us? I think it's fairly, fairly simple. The right choice of teacher for us today is the one, again, who does not innovate on the message that they teach, who is firmly rooted in the apostolic past with the message delivered from Jesus.

With such a wide variety of teachers so readily available to us today, it is not hard to find ones that deviate from the truth, and quite often they try and find us. People who perhaps say the gospel message must be changed for a new generation to stay relevant. Perhaps more subtly, people who say the gospel message must be changed for other cultures that we come in contact with. There's certainly a stream of people out there who say this. These are not the teachers we ought to listen to.

[ 8 : 48 ] The ones we ought to listen to are the ones who teach the truth as revealed by God at the very start, never swerving from that. Now, of course, we don't have the apostles living and breathing with us today, but we do have their teaching. It is written for us. It's written in the New Testament in which they affirm all of the Old Testament as authoritative as well. We have what the apostles taught written down.

Well, the ones we ought to listen to are concerned that they do not abandon the truth first revealed by God. That's the first characteristic of the true teacher, the right choice laid out in the first half of this letter. The second characteristic is this. Many will claim to love us and care for us, but we must notice what that love looks like because the true teacher has a love that is shaped by the commands of God. Love and the law are intimately linked. If you want to know what love looks like in a situation, then God has expounded that in his law and his commands. And we see love language is written throughout this letter. And that love is given a concrete shape in verse six. The love of the real teacher, the one who abides in the truth, is given to us in verse six as a love that walks according to the commandments of Christ. This is not a nebulous, ethereal, wafty sentiment.

This is love as expounded, as applied in the commands of God himself. The false teachers will come to this church in 2 John and will claim to love it.

But this church can look at them and see that their love does not look like the kind of love that God has revealed in his commands. And so they can see that their love is false.

But this is not so with the apostles, with teachers like them. The church must listen and love, unite and submit to the one whose love looks like God's commands that is shaped around what he's revealed.

[ 11 : 05 ] And that is the case today. It has not changed. I think a frequent rallying cry of those who we ought not to listen to is something like this. Jesus wanted us to love others, and so we mustn't judge this or that sin. They claim to love those who they trap. Well, although they claim to love people, their love is not shaped like the commands of God, like the love God describes himself, which turns people from sin and turns them back to true life.

If these teachers' love does not match how God says love looks, then they're not the ones we should listen to. Listening to them would be the wrong choice, the opposite of what the apostle John wants here.

And so if a teacher's supposed love for their people leads them to rob them, promising blessings in return for great gifts of money, or if their love leads them to sexual immorality, or if their love for their people leads them to manipulative and oppressive anger over others, perhaps even in the name of discipline, then their love doesn't match the commands of Christ, and they shouldn't be listened to, shouldn't be united with and supported by the church. But if a teacher, like the apostles, loves the weak by encouraging them, loves the idle by admonishing them to work, loves the sinner by calling them to repentance, loves their people by valuing life, by valuing justice and truth.

In short, if their love takes on the contours of God's commands, then that is the mark of a genuine teacher who the church should listen to, who they should support and love and submit to.

This kind of love is the love that marks out the apostles and those like them. They stick to the truth once delivered by Jesus, revealed by God, and their love is a love that is shaped like the commands of God. These are the ones that the church should be listening to. Four, unity with the apostles and those like them is unity with God and his truth. And if you skip ahead to verse nine, you'll see that abiding in this truth, listening to these people means that we have God himself. It's abiding and united around this truth that we have the grace, mercy, peace, and love from God that John speaks about in verse three. There are great stakes in this choice in making the right choice. In the second half of the letter from verse seven onwards, John switches to the opposite of this and describes the wrong choice. In many ways, the wrong choice is the direct opposite of the right choice. Instead of loving truth, they are deceivers in verse seven. They are against Christ. They're described, you see, there as antichrists in verse seven. And so many of the characteristics that John lays out for us here are not surprising. Let's briefly look at those together. The wrong choice, the teachers that shouldn't be listened to go on ahead of Christ and they deny his coming in the flesh. We see that in verse nine.

[ 14 : 14 ] These incoming teachers have gone on from Jesus. Perhaps they affirm that there's something worthwhile in the apostles message, but really they're saying it's nowhere near enough. We have more now.

We've moved to greater enlightenment. Uh, we've seen something that no one else has seen before about Jesus. And that's what's important. It seems in verse seven, they're denying even that Christ came in the flesh. And so they undermine the whole apostolic message. What they teach is far, far from the apostles gospel that they still claim the name of Christ. They're still claimed to be Christians.

These people are deceivers who have abandoned the truth that Jesus revealed at the beginning. They've chased novelty. They're not satisfied with the life changing wonder of the true gospel. And instead they long for greater worldly wisdom, perhaps to possess insights that they can use to lord over others, to take power and authority for themselves. Perhaps they, perhaps teachers like this would say something like, uh, I'm a Christian, but I don't believe that, uh, any of the miracles of the Bible actually happened. And so we need to change our message, move on from that for a new scientific generation that just don't believe in those things. And I'm sure you can think, uh, think about many other examples that you've come across in your time. And as we've already spoken about, their love is not like the love of the apostles. It isn't shaped around the commands of Christ.

It doesn't take on the contours of God's law. Uh, you'll notice in verse nine, along with their denial of the incarnation of Christ. They don't abide in the teaching of Christ either. Their supposed love is not love at all, but is evil and an excuse for evil. People like this are out there.

They're everywhere. You'll find them on the TV. You'll find them quite easily on the internet. You'll find them in bookshops, even in our Christian bookshops. There are people like this trying to gain the ear of our churches all the time, uh, trying to take the ear of church leaders and also of ordinary church members. But we know what they look like now. That's why John is describing these people.

[ 16 : 32 ] They've moved on from the old, old message of Christ, the one delivered from the beginning, the one revealed and recorded in the Bible. And their love bears no resemblance to how God describes love.

They do not walk in his commands. And so the church must make the right choice and refuse to listen to these teachers because unity with these teachers means not having God. There's a shocking contrast in verse nine. Those who abide in the truth have God and Christ themselves, but those who don't abide in the truth, who go on ahead, don't at all. They do not have God, though they claim to.

And in verse eight, you'll notice that, uh, listening to them means great loss. It's great risk. The consequences of getting this choice wrong are huge. And that's perhaps why, uh, perhaps that goes some way to explaining the apparent harshness of the command in verse, verses 10 and 11.

They, they appear quite shocking in first reading. We aren't even welcome. These welcome these people into our houses. Let's go so far against our, uh, let's be nice to everyone sort of sentiments.

And it goes further than this. Do not even greet them because if you do either of these things, then you're joining in with their wickedness. Uh, it's perhaps helpful to remember that, um, churches met in houses at this time, that traveling teachers often relied on support and hospitality.

[ 18 : 09 ] Uh, so to welcome someone into your house and give greeting is, is almost synonymous with supporting their ministry, giving them a hearing in your church, but we shouldn't use that to explain away the bluntness and the seriousness of this command. It is not right that the church or Christian do anything to support a supposed ministry that denies the truth of Christ and does not follow the commands of Christ. It is not right. The fellowship we have with one another as Christians flows from the unity we have around the true gospel. It's because we are all servants of the true Lord, the true Christ that we are truly united. And so it is not right to extend that same fellowship to those who've abandoned that unity by abandoning the truth.

And to do so is to join in with their destruction of the church, to become responsible in some part for the evil deception that they do. This is a very strong warning. It is uncomfortable.

We must be careful. We do need to qualify this. John doesn't mean here that we do this lightly. This is not someone we mildly disagree with. It's not, for example, the one who disagrees with our view of baptism. And we must acknowledge that we sometimes find it far too easy to break with people who we oughtn't break with. Uh, we're willing to make our preferences and fallings out a theological issue that self-justifies and destroys the unity we ought to have. That is not what John is talking about here. This is for those who deny the truth of the Bible. Notice how, how serious their false teaching is. They reject the coming of Christ in the flesh, the very central truths of what we believe.

They hold that in contempt. They have disdain for the apostolic message, the ones who received the truth from Christ himself. And they believe that they've moved on to better things, that the gospel of Jesus Christ is irrelevant now, that there's more than that. And it's useless. That's what they believe.

And their supposed love is not shaped by like Christ's commands. They don't even follow him. They don't do as he says. That's the kind of teacher that John is talking about here.

[ 20 : 29 ] And there are lots of those type of teachers out there. And they often have far too much influence over us. Perhaps even when we've far too quickly denounced someone who is a brother, who we should be united with. And these real deceivers, the ones described by John, should not be welcomed in our church pulpits. They should not be supported by our money. They should not be promoted by us, even listened to by us. A loving, listening unity with the true teachers, those who match the apostle's message and the apostle's love means unity with Christ himself, receiving love and grace and peace from him. But the same unity to these deceivers is very, very different. It is wicked and evil.

And so this is the choice that's laid out by John here in this letter for the church that he's writing to. And that's a crucial choice for a church in any age. And it's a crucial choice for a Christian in any age, particularly an age like this one, with so many voices so easily and readily available.

So many people seeking to get our ear and our hearts. So what choice will you make? And what choice will you help your church leaders to make? The right choice or the wrong choice?

Because it is an incredibly important choice with important high stakes. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have revealed the truth to us and that you've delivered it to us.

Please help us to stick to it. Stick to it despite many voices who would love to tempt us away with something new, something different. Help us to help us to spot those who would destroy us and keep our hearts far from them.

[ 22 : 34 ] And remind us that in this way, in the truth revealed to us by God at the beginning is grace and peace and love everlasting from you.

Amen.