

The Love of Rejection

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October 31, 2021

I don't know if you've noticed this, but people have strong opinions. Like everywhere. Perhaps now more than ever we find ourselves politically divided to the point of anger, rage and even violence. You can't turn on a news network, an aggregate news website, or load twitter without being bombarded with rhetoric and exaggerations of one side of the political aisle making a point to discredit and demean the other. These have even extended into personal interactions between family members, friends and neighbors.

As a sports fan, I'm as guilty as anyone of this tendency to strong opinion. There are television programs, and they tend to be the most popular ones, that are literally dedicated to arguing. Arguing about dumb sports things that will be irrelevant by this time next week.

This tendency to separate from one another along ideological, philosophical, political, preference, and taste, is part and parcel of life in our current social climate. But paradoxically, existing alongside this division, is a longing for unity. Maybe, even as a response to the division, there is a need for community and consensus that brings us back together.

As Christians, this idea is central to our idea of the church. Varying types of people, from varying places on earth, from various times and eras, all unified in faith, trust and love of Jesus in his gospel. It's a special thing that can bring together Jews and Gentiles, old and young, Yankee fans and Red Sox fans. A central reality of the church is that there is unity in the first things (the gospel) while yet there might be division in the second things.

But what we are reading this morning, makes clear that that unity can extend only so far. That there is something worth dividing over. A truth, that when abandoned, ceases to hold together the ever competing worldviews of Grizzly and Bobcat. Inside of such a divided culture, that yet longs for unity and peace, the western church has held up unity as a battle standard against cultures encroaching wave of disagreement and conflict.

We will see this morning, John arguing for division. Specifically the church and her people rejecting any version of faith that abandons Jesus as the center. It's not just rejecting the idea, it's also turning away those that would. What we are going to see through this short letter is this: **True love rejects all that abandons Jesus.** The big idea we are going to read about this morning is how the church is to respond to those that have rejected the truth of Jesus as the son of God made flesh. And what that temptation means for the church and her people. How the church is to respond to it.

We are going to separate our text this morning into three parts: **1. Walking in Truth and Love, 2. The Doctrine of the Deceivers, 3. The Church's Response.** Everything John pens this morning, is supportive of a church that is threatened by a Christless doctrine of faith. As we read and dive into this text this morning, my hope is that it would provoke a heart of discernment. That we would be more cautious and thoughtful as to what and who we listen to, regarding truth, love and how we live. But

also that we, corporately and privately, would actively reject any faith or spiritual practice, or future hope, that does not hold at its center the person and work of Jesus.

2 John 1-3. This introduction of John's second letter sounds much like most of the letters written in the NT as they begin. Beginning with a greeting. "The elder to the elect lady and her children." The elder is John, the elect lady is the church, and her children are its members. When we first read that opening, it sounds like it might be to an individual, but by calling her "elect", and then in the closing, where John shares well wishes from the "elect sister", he's referring to the church he is at. So it's John, from one church, writing to another church. And because there is no specific recipient names, it's likely this was actually written to a group of churches in a specific area. This will be made even clearer, as we explore the content of this letter, and the pressure he exerts in it.

The beautifully concise nature of this letter is such that, included in his greeting and opening, is an introduction to what he has to share with this church. The word "truth" occurs four times in these verses, and "love" occurs twice. We know that we are going to be talking about truth and love. Let's begin the body of his letter, **1. Walking in Truth and Love**

2 John 4-6. Reading this section, we see a couple of things. We see John excited that some in this church are walking in truth, he asks them to love one another, and he connects truth to love, via the commandments of scripture. So there is a question begged here, as he talks about truth; what is the "truth" that John is talking about. He is so excited that these Christians are "walking in the truth", what is it that he is excited about? What truth is he celebrating and affirming? There are a lot of truths that we could affirm.

But here he is pointing to something unique. As would be expected as we read this letter, there is a lot of consonance with John's first letter. **1 John 1:5-7. 1 John 3:23-24.** Walking in the truth, is to live life in a way that is consistent with the commands and example of Jesus, as the incarnate Son of Man. The distinction between light and darkness in the first set of verses, is a life lived in darkness apart from faith in Jesus as Saviour, and a life lived in the light of Jesus and his gospel. The truth that John is talking about here is an affirmation of this church's commitment to the doctrine of Jesus.

Might seem a silly thing to affirm to a Christian church. Yay you love Jesus. But look at the phrase again. **2 John 4.** John only has affirmation for some of these church members as those who are walking in the truth of Jesus as King. As will be clear in the coming verses, Jesus as the Christ, the saviour, Jesus the physical incarnation of God in flesh, was not a given reality for some that call themselves Christian.

Nevertheless, he follows up his affirmation, with a request and command. **2 John 5.** Love one another. Like unity, love is an idea and virtue that we can all get behind. Both culturally and inside of the church. When we think of Love as a verb, I think the first thing we think about the outward facing aspects of what we are as the body of Christ. The second pillar of our 50/50 legacy here at Sovereign Church: 1. Healthy Church, 2. Missoula Church, 3. Sending Church. We want to be a church loves our city. That cares for the weak, marginalized, and forgotten.

As foundational as that is for who God calls his people to be, and who we want to be a church, this is not the kind of love that John is speaking about here. He is talking about loving “each other.” Those inside of the church, loving those inside of the church.

Now, there can be a lot of vaguery around some of the words in the Bible. Like what does it mean to love each other? What exactly is John after here as he asks them to love? Again, our minds probably wonder to the physical and emotional needs of our brothers and sisters. Caring for the Velin family as Sarah has shoulder surgery. Making them meals, helping with their kiddos, praying with them, encouraging them. Giving shelter and financial help to those in our body in a tight spot. Serving and helping the sick in our church. Again, all good things. All charges given to God’s people, just not here.

Look at how John clarifies what he means by love when he defines it for us: **2 John 6**. Walking in what? Walking in truth. He is making a deep connection between loving one another inside of the church, and walking in the truth. Which he has already established was walking in the reality of the incarnate Jesus, walking in the reality of Jesus as the Son of God, walking in the reality of Jesus as the atonement and payment for sin. In other words, shaping our inner and out lives around the truth of Jesus.

So, to love one another, is to walk in truth with one another. The kind of loving that is encouraged here is loving each other by encouraging our brothers and sisters with the truth of Jesus. Reminding the suffering church member that, as Paul writes in Romans, “this present suffering does not compare to the glory that is to be revealed to us.” A glory purchased by the incarnate Jesus on the cross.

Loving our church enough, to every single week from the pulpit, preach Jesus as our only hope and salvation. Teaching one another in counseling the centrality of Jesus and his gospel regarding everything that life could possibly throw at us. Walking along side each other in discipleship not with vague encouragement and a spiritualized morality, but building from and building to the gospel, in all of life.

The love we are commanded here is to hold fast to the centrality of the gospel of Jesus, not just for our own sake, but for the sake of one another. In one paragraph John encapsulates an idea that we cherish here at Sovereign Hope. You may have heard it phrased as “the gospel for all of life.” Everything we do in ministry both formally and informally, should always have it’s roots in the person and work of Jesus. From the preaching, to the discipleship, to counseling, to potlucks, to new buildings, to being a Missoula church, to community groups, to GCF, to everything.

The first point that John makes to this church is the centrality of Jesus to everything. Specifically his incarnation and work on the cross. This is made even clearer, by the next point this morning. **2. The Doctrine of the Deceivers**. We alluded to some of John’s writing in his first letter, to help explain some of the phraseology he uses, that we might understand more clearly what he is after in his exhortations and his encouragement. The next verse confirms why he is writing about a church holding on to Jesus as the center of their life and doctrine. **2 John 7**.

First off, the word ‘antichrist’ can be a little scary. I know the first time I read this I was like uhh, not thanks. Not real interested in talking about that. But here it’s so clear as to who the ‘antichrist’ is: the

deceiver. The one who has gone out to teach against Jesus. There are two ways here that the deceiver denies the truth of Jesus that God is after in our love.

First, that Jesus was not the second member of the trinity. He was merely a man, perhaps had some good moralities and stories to share, had some amazing moments of power and control, but he was a man. Like Elijah was a man, yet did amazing things. Like Moses was a man that spoke to God. Like Solomon and David, who had wonderful truths and ideas to share. But a man nonetheless. Not God.

Second, that Jesus, whether he was God or not, didn't fully atone for sin as he died, did not fully purchase pardon from death as he rose again. That the work of Jesus in the gospel was not sufficient for the salvation of humankind, but rather a piece or part of God's mission. Either way, these deceivers are teaching lies and deceptions about who Jesus is, and the role he now plays in the church.

Putting this all together, John is encouraging these churches to walk in truth of the gospel, to love one another with the truth of the gospel, because there are insidious and deceptive teachers trying to pull them away from Jesus as central to their life and faith. And sadly, they are not entirely unsuccessful. **2 John 4.**

If some of them are walking in the truth, some of them are not. Presumably, there was great concern on John's part, and on the rest of this church's part. These deceivers were attractive in their lies, and effective in pulling some people away from Jesus. There were a lot of historical heretical teachings of these kinds of folks. But ultimately they had in one thing in common: the denial of the fullness of Jesus.

Something vital to get here, John is making a historical, factual claim. He says, "those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ 'in the flesh.'" Jesus was a real man. A real, living breathing person on this earth. God made flesh. Incarnate deity. It is as much a historical fact claim as it is a theological and spiritual one.

This is so important, especially as we read it now. Often when we read God's word and study it and talk about it, we sometimes forget that we are reading history. We are reading an accounting of history by God's own hand. Especially regarding Jesus, his life, and his death and resurrection. Look how Paul talks about it in **1 Corinthians 15:1-8.**

The way God saved his people is through the very physical reality of Jesus on earth. The very physical reality of the excruciating suffering and death of the man Jesus on a wooden cross, where he bleed out, in sweat and pain. Central to the gospel is the very physical reality that that body that died on a cross didn't stay dead, but was raised to life by the power of the Spirit. Central to the truth that these Christians are walking in is the very physical reality that once he was raised from the dead, Jesus appeared to a bunch of people. Proving once and for all he is who he said he was.

The historicity of the events of Jesus life are as central to love and truth as the spiritual realities are. Because without the physical realities, the spiritual ones don't matter. I have a friend. We went to school together, became really good friends for a while before they left Missoula. All of my

conversations with them would have pointed to a person who believed in the gospel, and trusted in Jesus as their hope and salvation.

Went to see them a number of years ago, and we were talking about life, faith and church. And our conversation led, somehow, to this very topic. And near the end of the conversation, this person, who I had little doubt was a believer, made a comment that floored me. They asked if I thought, that someone had to believe that Jesus was really God in flesh, that he really died, and that he really rose from death, in order to be a Christian in the eyes of God. I said of course. Said they didn't think so. Then I asked if they thought that, said no. Think its a story, or metaphor, meant to point to virtue and character of God that humanity should aspire to. Therein achieving closeness and communion with our creator.

Since then, I've had that same conversation with maybe two dozen students on campus, most of which called themselves Christian. Church, this is rejection of Jesus, veiled in metaphors, stories, and poetry. And it's far more pervasive than any of us think.

Another uncomfortable conversation. My second year here at Sovereign Hope, on staff. We were tabling in the UC for bear fair. That's where all the ASUM student groups get to be visible and available for freshman. We were tabling, and a small group of students came over, like 2 or 3, and we started talking. They were saying some things that made me think they grew up in the church, and were looking for a Christian community on campus.

Quickly, after a minute or two, I learned that they were all mormon. And we were talking, as if on the same page. Now, the goal of our tabling is to get contact information from these students, so we can ask em out to coffee, get to know them, and either, start a discipleship relationship with them if they are believers, and if they aren't, start a relationship with them that we might share the gospel with them.

Out of the blue, one of their friends comes up, and just explicitly asks, do think mormons are Christians. This is after a decently long conversation with two of them, this person walks up. I tried desperately to avoid a one word answer. I'd spent 5-10 minutes talking with two of them, got their phone numbers, they seemed interested in a coffee date. After talking around it for a little bit, and being pressured for an answer, I finally said no. I said, believing in Jesus as the mormon church teaches, I don't think you could be a Christian. All of them, gone.

There are over 16 million mormons in the world, nearly all of which, would also call themselves Christian. More insidious and deceptive than that is the prosperity gospel. A survey done by LifeWay in 2018 showed that, of Protestant churchgoers, 38% agreed with the statement, "My church teaches that if I give more money to my church and charities, God will bless me in return." As if tithing and giving is somehow an investment account.

That's nearly 4 in 10 people that attend a protestant church, are being taught that faith in God is a means to financial wealth, physical health, and material prosperity. It's a perversion of the gospel that turns Jesus into a vending machine for health, wealth and power. And nearly 40% of these surveyed Protestand churchgoers are being taught that faith and gospel is an investment strategy, where prayer and giving are tools to lure God into blessing you with material gain.

These deceivers are all around us. Enticing our greedy and prideful hearts into thinking of ourselves and not our saviour. These deceivers are not only a first century church threat, they are a threat to our faith, in our county, in our city, today. That is why the redundant emphasis on truth. The redundant emphasis on the truth of Jesus as the son of God made flesh, the atonement for sin.

Now what do we do with this? How are we to respond to this threat that John lays out? Well first, he's given one: hold on to the truth. Hold on to Jesus as the center of all. And make sure you are loving each other with that truth. But graciously, he gets a little bit more specific in what he means by that.

3. How the Church Responds.

For the rest of the body of our text we get a window into specifically, how these churches are to respond the threat of these deceivers with love. We get three different facets of that love. **a. Hold on to Hope.**

2 John 8. Threaded throughout this short letter is hope in what will be. Hope in an eternity promised and secured by Jesus for his people. The command here is to “watch yourselves.” Take care of your doctrine and your teaching. Ensure that what you are believing, the teaching you are holding to, is consistent with *The* truth you are to walk in. Not entirely different from his encouragement earlier.

Yet look at the weight he puts here, “that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.” This clear reference to eternity only heightens the vitality of holding fast to Jesus. What's at stake isn't a difference of opinion, but salvation and eternity. Which is why his language toward those that preach a Christless gospel, is so harsh to us the words ‘deciever’ and ‘antichrist.’ So much more is at stake here.

This isn't the first time he alludes to it in our text. **2 John 1-3.** This is a church threatened by a Christless gospel, some have bought into it, and they likely discouraged and anxious. So John threads throughout a hope and expectation of what ‘will be.’ The beauty of the gospel is not that it promises material prosperity or relational harmony or political power. But that it promises an eternity of peace, grace and mercy. A reward that moth and rust will not destroy, but that will last forever.

And yet that's what is so tempting, isn't it. We want our reward now. We want more immediate fulfillment of our peace, comforts and pleasures. Which is perhaps why a prosperity gospel is so appealing.

What this church needs is hope. Some of their people are being lured and enticed by these false ideas of faith and spirituality, there is persecution and political pressure, it feels like all around they are fighting a losing war. True hope for the Christian is not in rescue from our current circumstances. There are a lot of religions, secular creeds, and consumer goods that promise to save you from joblessness, addiction, and broken relationships. Only Jesus can offer an eternal reward, only Jesus can offer what ‘will be.’

2. Teach Jesus Always. 2 John 9. The phrase, “goes on ahead” and “abide in” are contrasted here. If Jesus wasn't really the son of God, or didn't really atone for the sin of humanity, or only partially paid

the penalty, then of course there would be more. There would be more atoning to do. There would be more work to do to reconcile our sinful selves back to a holy and perfect God.

But Jesus said, “It is finished.” Complete. Sin totally and utterly paid for in a moment. There is no work or effort or sacrifice or penance to be paid. To say or to teach otherwise is to not have God. Is to not be reconciled in relationship to our creator. Most, if not nearly all in this room would affirm that.

But there are subtle ways that we ‘move beyond’ the gospel, looking for answers to our spiritual woes in something else. A blog post, a TED talk, a podcast, a new book, medication, a distraction, self-care. Here’s the thing, those aren’t bad things. All of those can be a means of grace for us to alleviate suffering, make sense of our experiences, or put in a modern context biblical truths and ideas.

But as with everything we tempted with excess. And we are tempted to rely on those graces more and more for relief. More and more for hope. So that what our hearts gravitate toward is no longer the gospel of Jesus, but these gifts that he gives us.

It’s why we emphasized what we did earlier about our ministry here at Sovereign Hope. Never would we think ourselves too advanced or too broken for the gospel. In every sermon, in every discipleship and counseling relationship, in every community group and relationship we teach Jesus always.

3. Reject the Deceivers. 2 John 10-11. Again we get these harsh words. But harsh words that make sense when what’s at stake is eternity. It’s important to make a distinction of who it is John is talking about here. It is teachers, religious leaders, traveling evangelists, that would teach and share a Christless gospel. The idea behind this strong warning is that the church wouldn’t be influenced by teaching that undermines the gospel of Jesus in any way.

For us, this distinction is vital. The warning is against Christlessness. Not a view of baptism. Not a view on the end times and eschatology. The warning is against the historical and salvific reality of Jesus, not a difference in liturgy and worship music. We mustn’t extend this kind of weighted warning to the theological, practical, and even secondary doctrinal issues that do separate us from our Presbyterian brothers and Sisters.

Which is why this strong warning requires discernment, and vigilance. It is easy to let your pastors and teachers worry about what is worth rejecting, and what is worth receiving. And because of vocation, your pastors may have a better grasp on some of these distinctions. But it is every believer’s responsibility nonetheless.

If you have kids, you have to know what they are consuming and listening to. If you are a husband or wife you must be discerning as to what influences and teachers and podcasts your spouse is trusting. If you have neither, the readied availability of millions of podcasts, a new book in the “Christian Life” category being published every 3 minutes, and cultural doctrines putting pressure on your faith every single day. All necessitating a discernment to know what are wicked works that we should reject.

But what if it’s people? What if it’s friends? What if its family that would teach a Christless gospel? Well in our verse he says “do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting.” Well look at our opening and our closing again. **2 John 1, 13.** Remember we are talking about the church when he

says Lady, and children. So when he says house, it would be consistent to think of the church. It makes sense then, that those who we would reject, are those that would have an influence in the teaching and shaping the life of church.

That still leaves us the question: what does that look like for your home? This is why we all must have discernment. Not only what is Christless, but also what that rejection looks like. After all, Jesus himself dines with the Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees. Most of them most certainly taught a faith and practice that rejected Jesus as Lord.

Ephesians 4:14-16. Notice some familiar words there? Truth and Love. Paul's point here though is that the church would grow in maturity, and have the discernment, the wisdom, and the conviction to face boldly a Christless doctrine. Without risk of being swayed from the truth. To, as Jesus did, break bread with those that would reject him.

Notice too the tone of love and mutual effort in Paul's words. Growing in maturity, and facing these hard things are not meant to be done in isolation. God has given us one another, the church, to confidently and with conviction share the true gospel, with *all* who do not believe in Jesus as King.

What this looks like in the Christian home is going to be distinct across the body. Do you have kids? How old are they? Are your kids believers? Are they easily swayed? Are you in a healthy place with the Lord? Do you have strong convictions? Are you able to answer some of the objections you know you will hear? Are you depressed or anxious? What does your Bible reading look like? How often are you in prayer? Are you living in any sin right now? Have you been attending church? Are you in a season of trial and suffering?

All of these questions and a thousand more necessitate discernment, that we would be guarded against the influence and manipulation of any gospel that isn't the true gospel. While yet fulfilling the command to share the true gospel. I told you earlier, I was talking to those Mormon students, greeting them, I would have received them into my home for a meal, I would have shared the gospel with them. Would I let one nanny for my children?

We all have a responsibility to guard our doctrine when it comes to Jesus and his gospel. It's a responsibility taken with such seriousness, that rejection is necessary. It speaks to an exclusivity of the gospel. But more impactfully, it speaks to the centrality of Jesus. Either way, the seriousness of the doctrines of Jesus, are ultimately central any understanding of love.

You see, that is what is loving about rejection. Knowing that sin is persuasive. Wealth and power are so tempting. Witty and winsome words from the mouth of a deceiver can be sweeter than any candy. Guarding ourselves, our families, and our church from such deception is one of the most loving things a church member can do. Because what's at stake is eternity.

Let's close our letter with John's signoff. **2 John 12-13.** Love how he ends it. I don't want to waste my time or this ink, so I must come see you. There is room for relationships between gospel believing churches that hold fast to Jesus. The letter itself is proof of that.

Next week Jonny is going to teach through 3 John. And where the struggle here is to avoid losing Jesus, and keep the wolves and false teachers out, 3 John is a beautiful description of what it means to receive our brothers and sisters from other churches and their global work.

Church hold fast to Jesus. If it ever gets boring for you, singing worship songs about the gospel, or listening to sermons that find the gospel in every text, come back to 2 John. You cannot have the church without Jesus. You cannot have what 'will be' without Jesus. And you cannot have love, without Jesus.