

Hold Fast to God's Love

January 6 • Lesson 6

Bible Background • 2 THESSALONIANS 2:13–3:5; 2 John 4–11

Printed Text • 2 THESSALONIANS 3:1–5; 2 JOHN 4–11 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 15:12–17

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: IDENTIFY Paul and John’s command to hold on to God’s love; EMBRACE the command that we show love for God by loving others; and DECIDE to love Jesus by obeying His commandments.

In Focus

The phone had not rung with his voice on the other end for years. Ruby clasped her fingers and prayed fervently for her son, Will, who was serving a life sentence in prison. “Lord,” she whispered through tears, “teach him your ways. Show him your unfailing love.”

Morning by morning, she prayed for exactly the same things and was careful to live God’s way on purpose so she could approach God with a clear conscience. She attended church regularly, tithed, served at the local food pantry, forgave others quickly, and asked for forgiveness even quicker. Ruby knew how to walk in her faith. Like David of the Bible, she was an imperfect woman who chased passionately after God’s own heart. Unfortunately, Will had walked away from God to a life of crime years ago. Many told Ruby to give up on him and to stop praying for his salvation. But Ruby still vividly remembered the promises she and her husband made the day Will was dedicated in their church decades earlier. Through her steadfast prayers, she begged God to save him. Even though he would likely die behind bars, he could still accept Christ as his Savior and experience a different kind of liberation. As she said Amen, the phone rang. “Mama, it’s me. I’ve got something to tell you,” the voice said. “I’ve been reading the Bible you gave me. Can you answer some questions?” Will asked.

How can walking in God’s commandments bless you and your family even when it seems fruitless?

Keep in Mind

“Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning” (2 John 6, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Doctrine didache (Gk.) — Principle teaching of Christian faith.

B. Deceiver planos (Gk.) — Impostor, or corrupter; one who wanders, leads astray, or seduces.

Say It Correctly

Ephesus. EF-uh-suhs.

Galatians. guh-LAY-shehnz.

KJV

2 Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

3 But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

4 And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

5 And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

2 John 4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

NLT

2 Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we ask you to pray for us. Pray that the Lord's message will spread rapidly and be honored wherever it goes, just as when it came to you.

2 Pray, too, that we will be rescued from wicked and evil people, for not everyone is a believer.

3 But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.

4 And we are confident in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we commanded you.

5 May the Lord lead your hearts into a full understanding and expression of the love of God and the patient endurance that comes from Christ.

2 John 4 How happy I was to meet some of your children and find them living according to the truth, just as the Father commanded.

5 I am writing to remind you, dear friends, that we should love one another. This is not a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning.

6 Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning.

7 I say this because many deceivers have gone out into the world. They deny that Jesus Christ came in a real body. Such a person is a deceiver and an antichrist.

8 Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked so hard to achieve. Be diligent so that you receive your full reward.

9 Anyone who wanders away from this teaching has no relationship with God. But anyone who remains in the teaching of Christ has a relationship with both the Father and the Son.

10 If anyone comes to your meeting and does not teach the truth about Christ, don't invite that person into your home or give any kind of encouragement.

11 Anyone who encourages such people becomes a partner in their evil work.

The People, Places, and Times

Paul. The apostle Paul, a Roman citizen born in Tarsus, was converted after encountering God on the road to Damascus. He was transformed from persecuting believers in Christ to being a preacher of the Gospel (Acts 9:1–31). He traveled on three missionary journeys spreading the Gospel. Paul visited Thessalonica, preached in the city’s synagogue, and established the church during his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1–4). After less than a month, he encountered violent harassment so he was sent away for his own safety (17:5–9). He wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth around AD 51. About six months later, he wrote this second letter.

John the Apostle. John was the son of Zebedee and the brother of James. Along with James, John was called by Jesus to become one of the twelve disciples while they were fishing (see Matthew 4:21–22). His name appears in each of the apostolic lists. Jesus gave John and James the nickname “Boanerges,” meaning sons of thunder (Mark 3:17). Their prominence among the Twelve is indicated by their presence along with Peter at the raising of Jairus’ daughter by Jesus (Luke 8:51) and at the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1; Mark 9:2). Paul attests to John’s prominence by referring to him as one of the “pillars” of the Jerusalem church (Galatians 2:6–10). According to some traditions, John survived until AD 100 in Ephesus, but it is also possible that he was martyred much earlier along with his brother James.

Background

The letter to the church at Thessalonica was written by the Apostle Paul, who established the church community there during his second missionary journey. This letter was written when Timothy returned from Thessalonica bringing Paul a report that the church was standing strong in faith. They stood firm in the face of the persecution that had precipitated Paul’s departure. The letter of 2 Thessalonians was most likely written from Corinth within three or four months of 1 Thessalonians and focuses on the second coming of Christ.

John the apostle wrote 2 John most likely from Ephesus. This letter was written to a congregation of believers for encouragement and instruction. He warns the church about deceivers, and urges the believers to love one another and remain grounded in sound teaching.

At-A-Glance

1. Hold onto God’s Love (2 Thessalonians 3:1–5)
2. Express God’s Love (2 John 4–6)
3. Be Watchful in God’s Love (vv. 7–11)

In Depth

1. Hold onto God’s Love (2 Thessalonians 3:1–5)

Paul begins by asking for prayer. He had shared the message of Christ and His love at Thessalonica and was preparing to share it with others. He prays for his deliverance as well as that of other believers. Paul encourages the Thessalonians to continue in the things he taught and commanded them. Paul prays that the believers at Thessalonica will be led into a full understanding of God’s love and its expression, which will enable them to stand firm in the truth. Paul doesn’t just pray that they will experience God’s love themselves; he prays that they will enter into the expression of that love toward God and others. As the church at Thessalonica was likely facing pressure and persecution, Paul wanted them to fully experience “the patient endurance that comes from Christ” and fully express God’s love for them (v. 5).

When are you most aware of God’s love for you?

2. Express God's Love (2 John 4–6)

God loves us, and when we love one another, we imitate the love of God. Loving others is also a way we can express our love for God. God loves His children, and we can demonstrate love for the Father by showing genuine love to His children.

John notes that the command to love one another is not new. Believers are to be characterized by love for each other, as Jesus taught (John 13:34–35).

As God demonstrated His love for us in a sacrificial manner, we are to sacrificially love others. We are to submit to one another in humility (1 Peter 5:5). We are to be patient and gentle with each other, and to forgive, comfort, and encourage one another. We are to pray for one another and love each other “in deed and in truth” (from 1 John 3:18).

Love for God is reflected by obedience to His commandments. This mirrors Jesus' teaching that loving Him meant following His commandments (John 14:15). We show love for God by humbly submitting to His will in obedience, knowing that His commands are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

As children demonstrate their love for their parents through obedience, we demonstrate our love for God through obedience. To love is to obey. Obedience is a response that is prompted by love—not simply by duty. A person who does not love will not obey, so obedience can be used as an indication of a person's true love for God.

Does your level of obedience to God reflect great love for Him, or does it reflect very little?

3. Be Watchful in God's Love (vv. 7–11)

John warns the church of those who present a false message of Christ. Specifically, some were teaching that Jesus did not come in a physical body. John describes anyone spreading this teaching as a deceiver and an antichrist. John urges the church to continue in the truth they were taught. They are not to welcome false teachers or participate in their evil work.

Instead, John instructs the church to continue in the truth about Christ, noting that whoever abides in the truth of Christ the Son has God the Father as well. Continuing in the truth will enable the church to receive a full reward.

In an age of a variety of teachings about the person, mission, and message of Christ, how do you ensure that you remain grounded in sound teaching?

Search the Scriptures

1. Paul highlights the Lord's faithfulness and expresses his confidence in the Lord that the Thessalonians will continue in his teaching (2 Thessalonians 3:3–4). Why is Paul's confidence in the Lord, rather than the Thessalonians such an important distinction?
2. What is the importance of clinging to sound teaching (2 John 9)? What are the consequences of wandering away from the truth?

Discuss the Meaning

1. In a society where it is customary for everyone to create (and break) his or her own rules, how can we improve our understanding of and adherence to God's commandments?
2. From your perspective, describe what walking according to God's laws should look like in your life. Which commandments do you need to work harder on following? Why?

3. How can you successfully identify false prophets and deceivers using the Word of God? How should you respond to them and their messages?

Lesson in Our Society

In such difficult times, marked by division and strife, we are called to love one another. We often do well loving people who are similar to us, but God does not call us to only love people like us. He calls us to love one another. This includes people who may hold different traditions and those with differing political views. This includes the poor, the sick, and the immigrants. We are to extend God’s love to this broken, dying world.

At the same time, we must ensure that we hold fast to sound teaching and continue in the things we have been commanded. We must also walk in integrity and work to earn our living. Finally, we must be committed to the spread of the love of God and message of the Gospel.

Make It Happen

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Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Colossians 3:5–17

2 Thessalonians 3:1–5; 2 John 4–11 1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you.

Before closing this letter, the Apostle Paul asked the Thessalonians to earnestly pray for him and his companions, as they had faithfully done for the converts. Biblical history shows that Paul and the other apostles often suffered persecution for the Gospel’s sake (Acts 19:23; 2 Corinthians 1:8–9; 11:23–28), and Paul recognized that they needed the saints to pray for them. Paul could witness to the Thessalonians in their times of troubles because he had experienced a great deal himself. Thus, he needed and asked for their prayers.

In addition, the Thessalonians were to pray so “that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified”—that it would spread rapidly and be honored wherever it went. Paul recognized that Satan was always trying to hinder God’s Word and His work. In the spirit world, the fight between good and evil is very real, but an all-powerful God can meet any of Satan’s challenges.

2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

There was no doubt in Paul's mind that many false teachers and others were enemies to the preaching of the Gospel—they were being used by Satan to impede the spreading of the Good News, but they were no match for the power of God. The saints, therefore, can pray to be delivered from false ministers, who bring more harm than good to the preaching of the Gospel. Paul wanted the Thessalonians and us to pray to be delivered from those who have neither conscience nor honor when it comes to preaching God's Word—they are influenced by Satan. In other words, they have their own agendas. Paul wanted us to not only pray together, but we are to pray for one another as well.

There was no doubt in Paul's mind that these false teachers and preachers were “unreasonable and wicked men” who did not have faith in Christ. In Greek, “unreasonable” is *atopos* (AH-to-poce) and means “improper, wicked, unrighteous, harmful.” Paul, however, knew God to be faithful to His children. Therefore, he explained to the Thessalonians that this same faithful God would “stablish” them and also “keep you [the believers] from evil.” In other words, God would help them build their hope on the firm foundation, which is Jesus Christ. God, through His Holy Spirit, keeps them from the evil ones both inside and outside the church. In addition to establishing them, He would preserve (“keep”) them (v. 3). John explained this “keeping” in his Gospel: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27–28). In other words, they would be kept, as in protected and led away from evil. Indeed, in spite of their trials and tribulations, the Thessalonians had grounds to hope in the Lord, who is a faithful God. We also have reason to hope and not give up on God in our struggles.

4 And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

Paul and his fellow laborers had “confidence” (Gk. *peitho*, PAY-tho), which means “belief in, faith in, trust in,” that the Thessalonians were doing all of the things that they had commanded them to do to stay on the right track in their walk with the Lord. Paul and his companions' confidence in the Thessalonians was based on their assurance or belief in the Lord, who is faithful. God would empower these struggling new believers by His Spirit, so that they would be able to comply and do what was right. With God's help, the Thessalonians would be a positive, fruitful witness for Him. Others would come to know Jesus through their witness.

5 And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

Paul made a short prayer for the Thessalonians, praying that God would direct their hearts. The word “direct” in Greek is *kateuthuno* (ka-tew-THOO-no) and means “to guide, to remove hindrances.” In essence, Paul prayed that, through the Holy Spirit, their hearts would be guided into the love of God. He knew that the Thessalonians, as it is with us, on their own could neither keep themselves or their hearts pure. The Holy Spirit had to work in them and guide them into God's truths.

Our love for God, with the help of the Holy Spirit, drives us to want to obey His commands. If we lean on and depend on Him, He will come into our dire situations and help us be overcomers, too. We need only to follow God's love and Christ's patient waiting (Gk. *hupomone*, hoo-pow-MOW-nay, patience or endurance). While simple to say, these ideas are life-changing when fully understood and applied. God shows us what love looks like. We see Him providing good things for His people and keeping them from harm. We also see Him freely sacrificing His own Son as the price to redeem His people. Likewise, Christ shows us what patience or endurance looks like. Jesus patiently taught His disciples over several years, explaining truths from the

Scriptures and showing how He fulfilled prophecy. Jesus also endured the cruel torture of crucifixion when He could have stopped it at any time. This is the love and patience Paul prays the Thessalonians will be guided in living out.

2 John 4–11

The important themes of belief, obedience, and love treated in the first letter of John are also central to his second and third letters. John manifests concern for the inner life of the church and for the doctrinal danger that threatens it externally. He urges his readers to be watchful and walk in the truth.

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

John's heart was highly elated at the consistent Christian life that members of the congregation practiced, as they are "walking in truth." The Greek word *peripateo* (peh-reepah-TEH-oh), which literally means to walk around, is figuratively used to signify the whole round of activities of the individual life. The use of the word "truth" (*aletheia*, ah-LAY-thay-ah) includes its doctrinal and ethical denotations. To walk in the truth involves belief and behavior. Walking in the truth conveys the imagery of a path along which one walks and keeps on course without deviating. The tense of the verb indicates this healthy spiritual life is a continued pattern. The truth that John talks about did not originate with humankind, not even with the apostles themselves, who originally received it. The truth originated in divine revelation. And so does the command to obey it. In John's epistle both the truth and the commandments are synonymous (cf. vv. 5–6).

5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we heard from the beginning, that we love one another.

John proceeds from commendation to exhortation, based on personal request (Gk. *erotao*, air-oh-TAH-oh; to ask, beg, appeal, or entreat). The commandment he affirms and urges on his readers was not new; it was as old as the Gospel (John 13:34–35). Here, John ties the command to believe to the command to love. To believe in the full humanity and divinity of Christ and His redemptive mission, and to demonstrate brotherly love is proof of the new birth (1 John 4:7; 5:1).

6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

John pursues the line of argument of his Gospel and first letter—that Christian love is more than mere emotion; it is action or demonstration. Love for God and for Christ is expressed in practical obedience (John 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 John 5:2–3). Jesus summarized the whole Law in the greatest commandment: love (Matthew 22:34–40). Here, John urges a continual walk in love.

7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

In the second part of this message (vv. 7–11), John draws the church's attention to the threat from without: false teaching. He describes the heretics, identifies their error, and warns not to be deceived or give any encouragement to them. John commands watchfulness. He urges the believers to remain loyal not only in love, but also to the teaching of Christ.

John affirms the appearance of false teachers in the world. The Greek word *exelthon* (eks-AIL-thahn; entered) means to go out, rendering the sentence "deceivers have gone out into the world." The errors of the heretic are both moral and doctrinal; the latter is in focus here. The Greek word *homologeō* (ho-mo-lo-GEH-oh), translated as "confess," also means to acknowledge, admit, or affirm. These heretics deny the incarnation of Christ as fully

man and God in the flesh. Anyone who denies that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh is considered in the spirit of antichrist. This biblical truth is very important for every Christian. During John's life, many who believed in Christ were influenced by philosophical schools and mystery cults that ignored or ascribed evil to the body, which John likely was addressing in these verses. The early church remained committed to Jesus Christ's incarnation as core to the faith, showing God willed to redeem fallen humanity rather than simply discard it and start over. The spirit of antichrist tries to lead people away from the truth that Jesus is God in the flesh. John describes any false teacher as a "deceiver" and "antichrist." The Greek word *planos* (PLAH-noce), translated as "deceiver," implies an impostor, or corrupter, one who wanders, leads astray, or seduces. This is a repeat of his earlier warning against "deceivers" and "many antichrists" (1 John 2:18, 26; 4:1–3). An antichrist is literally someone who is against the Messiah. This is not a separate category of people from the deceivers, but instead those who deceive concerning Christ's nature are opposed to Christ, and are described with both of these terms.

8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

This is the first command of the letter: a warning to be on guard. The Greek word *blepete* (BLEH-peh-teh), written in present tense, implies continual watchfulness to prevent disaster. John commands readers to reject the enticement of error for two reasons: to prevent the ruin of what both they and John had worked for, and to ensure that they would be paid their reward in full. The rewards would likely include their new freedom from the bondage of sin, the legalism of the law, the tyranny of evil, and the limitations of themselves. John would also be concerned with the eternal glory they would receive at the resurrection. This is one place to consider heavenly rewards in light of obedience to God beyond salvation itself. Jesus' parables of the pounds and talents seem to point to the promise of heavenly rewards and we see that reality of heavenly rewards throughout the New Testament (Matthew 6:1, 1 Peter 1:17, Luke 6:23). As Peter points out, these rewards are not salvation which is by grace, but heavenly rewards given for obedience.

9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

Two contradictory consequences of heterodoxy (or false doctrine) and orthodoxy are stated. The negative is mentioned first. The false teachers were trying to change the core doctrine the Christians had received, but he who fails to abide (to stay, or to remain) by the doctrine cannot have Christ and His salvation. The opposite is also true. To remain continually in the doctrine (Gk. *didache*, dee-dah-KAY) or teaching of Christ (in belief in and in obedience to Him) is proof of the believer's personal relationship to both the Father and the Son.

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

John adds a practical note after warning about deceivers. He says that the church is not to receive these deceivers into their houses. He then goes even further to say that they should not even bid them "God speed" (Gk. *chairō*, KHEYE-roh). This is the word for "rejoice" or "be glad." It was a common greeting that essentially meant "Be well." By receiving false teachers into your home or wishing them well, you partake (Gk. *koinoneō*, koy-noh-NEH-oh) in the false teachers' evil deeds. This is a key to the idea of this sacred community: The church is responsible to be light in the community. We are the body of Christ in the world. If the church or believers see people violating the livelihood of others or see someone suffering and do not show love, but rather give a stamp of approval, it is a bad reflection on the church and Christ. We become like the Levites and Pharisees who see the man on the side of the road and walk by, instead of the good Samaritan who stops to show God's love which is the core of John's message to followers of Jesus (Luke 10:29–37, 2 John 5).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

**Love as I Have Loved You
(John 15:12–17)**

TUESDAY

**Live in Love and Light
(1 John 2:7–11)**

WEDNESDAY

**Live by the Truth
(1 John 2:20–27)**

THURSDAY

**Support Coworkers
(3 John 2–8)**

FRIDAY

**Stand Firm in the Faith
(2 Thessalonians 2:13–17)**

SATURDAY

**Do What Is Right
(2 Thessalonians 3:6–13)**

SUNDAY

**Love God and One Another
(2 Thessalonians 3:1–5; 2 John 4–11)**