

SECOND JOHN "Walking in Truth and Love"

2 John 1-13

This morning we'll be looking at an entire book of the Bible. We will be in 2nd John looking at all 13 verses. I got amused by one of the commentaries which referred to these 1 chapter books at the end of the N.T. (2 & 3 John and Jude) as being more like postcards than letters. Well, they may be short but they are full of important truth. And so during the month of March we'll study all 3 of them. I want you to consider how the N.T. ends.

We have 1, 2 & 3 John. They call us to live in the truth. They're followed by Jude which warns us about false teachers and a potential apostasy for believers in the last days. These are followed by the Book of Revelation which promises us that Jesus is coming back, so be ready. God in His sovereignty is reminding those of us living here in these last days to remain in the truth, to beware of false teachers, deceivers and then hold onto the truth and proclaim it until Jesus gets here.

By way of introduction to Second John, let me read the opening verses. READ 2 John 1-4.

Here the author simply refers to himself as "the elder." The early church recognized the writer of this letter as being the Apostle John. He was often referred to as John the Elder by those he ministered to in his home church. At this time John serves as a pastor/teacher at Ephesus. He's in his 90s at this point and is the only one of Jesus original disciples still alive.

He is writing to "the elect lady and her children." Is this a person or a church? Theologians and Bible scholars are split. Based on what I read I tend to think he is writing to an unnamed person, a woman. I have several reasons for this view: (1) this letter is written in the classic Roman style for personal correspondence; (2) never in the N.T. is the church ever referred to as having children; (3) in verse 5 he again says, "I ask you, dear lady...";

(4) in verse 10 he says, "do not receive him into your house." So I believe that John is referring to an actual woman who is a Christian. He calls her "the elect lady." Throughout the N.T. Christians are referred to as the elect of God, the chosen, the called and so forth. It's possible that this Christian woman is a widow because John writes to her and her children but doesn't mention her husband. We also know that John has never met this woman personally. He knows about her through her sister (which we will see later in v 13). John's been made aware of a situation surrounding this elect lady through her family who he probably knows from his ministry at the church of Ephesus. So then what I want you to see is that 2 & 3 John are personal letters from the Apostle John. They have similar themes, 2 John is written to a Christian woman and 3 John is written to a Christian man.

Second John is probably the only book in the Bible that is specifically written to a woman. Very interesting.

So why is John writing this woman? What's the issue? It was common during this period of the early church for the apostles and their trained disciples to travel around and preach at the various house churches. When they would do so the people in those churches in those cities would extend hospitality to them. They would put them up and feed them. This lady is one who is showing hospitality. The problem is that many false teachers caught on to this and took advantage of Christian hospitality. In the guise of being preachers of truth they went around to these places and taught their version of the truth (in reality they were false doctrines, teachings, what we call "heresies"). The things they were teaching ran counter to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which the apostles had taught. This is a major problem in the early church.

You need to remember that there is no N.T. canon yet. The teachings are by word of mouth spread from church to church. And the apostles are dying out. Add to that widespread persecution where you have people moving around a lot. If a person is not well-grounded in the truth it would

be easy to be misled by these false teachers, charlatans, frauds, liars, antichrists.

John addresses this issue to the church in general in 1 John and now, specifically, to a Christian woman here in 2 John. Many of the N.T. letters are devoted to countering false teachers and warning the church not to listen to them. To this woman John says don't even open your door to them! So there you have just a basic background.

READ 2 John 1-4

Five times in these 4 verses the word "truth" is mentioned. As Christians we need to know the truth, love in the truth, abide in the truth, be guided by the truth, walk in the truth and uphold the truth. What is the truth? It is what God reveals to us in His Word. It is the Gospel message – that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that salvation is by faith in Him alone, that by believing in Him we can have eternal life. We are at a major advantage as Christians today in 2022 because we have the entire canon of Scripture readily available to us. We know the truth.

What I want you to focus in on in these first 4 verses is how the theme we saw in 1 John is carried forward here in 2 John. [Show Q 2 slide] In 1 John he linked together belief (truth) with love and obedience. Here we see it again. V 1, we "know the truth." V 2, the truth "abides in us" and it doesn't go away. It lasts forever. V 3, our connection with God the Father, God the Son and other believers is "in truth and love." V 4, John rejoices to see that this small group of believers is "walking in the truth, just as we were commanded" by God – obedience. So again, belief (truth), love and obedience are interconnected.

So then the foundation has been laid for what John is about to say to this Christian family, a woman and her children.

READ 2 John 5-6

This closely parallels what John said in 1 John 2:7-11. What he said then applies here. What John writes is not a new commandment. You've heard it before. In a sense it's an old commandment that you "had from the beginning," since you first came to Christ.

The commandment John is referring to is, v 5, "that we love one another." This is what Jesus had told His disciples in the Upper Room the night before He was betrayed. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35).

And then in v 6 John isn't just repeating what he just said he is saying in essence that the command to love goes back. It is based on what Jesus taught, yes, but it is also based on the O.T. law, the Ten Commandments – what John calls "the commandment." So this commandment that we love one another, it goes way back. It is deeply entrenched in our theology.

This family that John is writing to, the elect lady and her children are, in fact, loving others. So then, for this family loving is not the issue. Something else is. We got a hint at what that is back in v 4 when he said, "some of your children are walking in the truth." Some, but not all.

READ 2 John 7-8.

Here John issues a warning about false teachers, antichrists, deceivers. V 8, "Watch yourselves." Do not embrace them. "...so that you may not lose what we worked for;" – so that you will not lose the truth that we taught you (forget). There is a real danger that if you give ear to what they tell you they will be convincing and drag you backwards spiritually.

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul warns about being "led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (1 Cor 11:3). V 8, "...but may win a full reward." I'm not sure about what that fully means but it has something to do with not receiving from God what He wants to give you – not losing your salvation but forfeiting part of your heavenly rewards. Whatever it

means it cannot be good. These false teachers are dangerous to you spiritually!

So what's the issue with this family John is writing to? They are loving, showing Christian hospitality but not being discerning about who they are showing it to. These recipients are NOT true believers (false prophets) and John warns if you are not careful they could lead you astray. READ Titus 1:10-11. These guys are those ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing that Jesus referred to in Matthew 7. So what should they do?

READ 2 John 9-11

First, v 9, be discerning. Determine if they are a sheep or a wolf. How do you know who is a true prophet of God, who teaches the truth, and who is not? [Show Q6 slide] Here's how – ask this one question. Are they teaching what Jesus taught ("abiding in the teaching of Christ") or are they "going on ahead," are they going too far? What we would ask today is: Is what this person teaching consistent with what Jesus taught? Is it consistent with Scripture? Go back to the Gospels and see what Jesus said about Himself – He claimed to be the Son of God, equal with the Father, the source of eternal life, the way the truth and the life. Go back and read Paul's letters. Go back and look at 1 John. Truth IS important! So then, be discerning. Know the truth.

Here's the bottom line, v 10-11. If that person that comes to you in the guise of being a teacher of righteousness and they are not teaching the truth about Jesus, about the Gospel... "do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting." Modern translation – "shut the door in their face."

V 11, If you are feeding him, giving him a place to stay then you are being a participant in his "wicked works." Strong words from the Apostle John, right? As Christians we need to be careful that we don't become vulnerable to those who will prey on our good will. Do not put yourselves in a compromising situation. That is what has been going on with this family.

READ 2 John 12-13

There is so much more I need to say. When I come in person we will talk face to face "so that our joy may be complete." Truth produces joy. Again, this is one of the themes of 1 John. I thought of those 2 disciples that Jesus talked to on the road to Emmaus. After spending several hours talking with Jesus and learning the truth they said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road and opened to us the Scripture" (Luke 24:32). Oh, that we would feel that same way every time we opened God's word and read it!

John closes with personal greetings from the woman's sister and her family. And that is Second John.

So what do I want us to take away from this letter? It is vital that we know the truth. It is imperative that we know what God's word says. The Bible must be our standard for truth. Not what the culture says. Not our own personal feelings. Not our opinions or political persuasions. Not our own experiences. Here you have a good Christian woman showing love and extending hospitality, but not being very discerning of truth. And it was a problem.

I'm giving you some homework, a case study. We can discuss next week. This is becoming a bigger and bigger problem for us Christians as we embrace our culture. In an effort to be relevant, let us not become irrelevant by compromising truth.