

December 10, 2017  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Epistles of John  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from 2 John.

1. What is the relationship between First John and Second John?
2. If John made such a big deal about loving others in the first letter, and then brought it up again as a trait of Christians in the second letter, why shouldn't we embrace false teachers with the intent to help them?
3. Does the command to be completely disassociated with false teachers seem extreme?
4. How do most Christians interact with false teachers who deny that Jesus is the Christ?
5. Is it arrogant for Christians to conclude that we and we alone have the truth?

## **LIVING IN THE TRUTH**

### **2 John**

We have various policies in place here at the church which we use as guidelines in decision making. Most of these individual policies have come into existence because of a need, a problem, or something we prefer to avoid. For example, we have a policy that if someone desires to park their RV in the parking lot, they have to sign a consent form that clearly states when they plan to leave. That seems unloving, doesn't it?

Here is the reason. A few years ago, a stranger showed up, introduced himself as a missionary/evangelist and asked if he could park here for a couple of days. At that moment the policy was developed. The reason is based on experience. I know of a church in the north that experienced the very same scenario. A traveling missionary/evangelist asked to park his RV at the church, where he and his family could use the church's electricity and water. Everyone wanted to show Christian hospitality and no one thought about an exit date. After several months of freeloading and stirring up discord in the church, the leaders finally figured out they had a problem. We have a policy that will prevent that particular problem.

That seems to be the problem in the early Church. Christians, like all good Roman citizens, were expected to show hospitality especially to fellow Christians. Itinerant teachers/evangelists (often called peripatetic teachers) were quite common in that day as they had been since the age of Greek philosophers. Jesus was essentially a teacher like that. They required hospitality.

As we can surmise, whenever there is a good and legitimate work of God taking place, Satan, and shysters driven by the lusts of the flesh, will take advantage of it. Second and Third John address this issue in very practical ways. First John laid down multiple tests we should use to determine if indeed we are born again. Second and Third John show us how to apply those tests in common, everyday circumstances.

For example, if a guy showed up out of the blue at church and claimed to be a teacher sent by God, did that require that God's people in the church welcomed him with open arms and met all his financial needs? What if he was "preaching" only for financial gain? What if he was actually a heretic, one of those antichrist-kind of guys John warned about in the first letter? This was such a common problem that in one of the earliest instruction manuals for the church (*the Didache*) the term *Christmonger* was coined to identify them.

Therefore, in this second letter, John has called back to some of the important tests of the faith he laid down in the first letter. Does the traveling teacher teach that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, co-equal with God? Does the teacher practice love for Christ and love for fellow Christians? If he does, embrace him and fellowship with him in truth. If he does not, reject him and have no fellowship with him

at all. That is not harsh, unjustifiable, separatism. It is simply what living in the truth looks like.

Unlike some epistles in the New Testament like *Romans* or *Hebrews*, there is not an important doctrinal teaching at the center of 2 John. Rather, this letter is all about day-in and day-out faithfulness. The Church is not about excitement, novelty, something new and bigger all the time. It is about loving Christ and Christ's people today and tomorrow and next week and next year until we are with Christ. Does that sound boring? We must never forget that the ideas and philosophies of this world always stand in conflict with Christ's plan for His Church. We need to learn to be content to keep living in the truth day by day. That will be sufficient.

### **Greetings (vv.1-4).**

Truth is the issue. Truth is always the issue. The elder confessed that he loves the lady and her kids in truth. *The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth (v.1a)*. The obvious question is, "Who was the elder?" We know from many other studies that this term elder refers to a leader. The idea goes all the way back to Moses' day in referring to family leaders. Elders were still leaders among the Jews in Jesus' day.

Not surprisingly then, we find them as officers in the early Church. There were multiple of these leaders in the church at Philippi. Paul began his letter to that church, *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons (Philippians 1:1)*. Notice that "overseers" (elders) is plural. Also Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders in every town (Titus 1:5).

In attempt to circumvent confusion on this issue, we at CBC conclude that every pastor is an elder, but not every elder is a pastor. Some elders are vocational (pastors) and some elders are laymen. We take the distinction from the statement in Paul's letter to Timothy where he instructed, *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17)*. John seems to represent this possibility as he is called *The elder*. The definite article clearly refers to a particular

elder who was well known. It clearly points to an elder who not only carried authority but was an authority among elders.

Okay, but who was the lady and her children? This seems to be a veiled reference to a particular local church. Notice that in verses 6,8,10,13 the plural pronouns *you* and *yourselves* is used. Also, there is a corporate sense conveyed in that some of the children are walking in truth and some are not. That is a good description of the typical local church.

John indicated the important principle that true love is love in truth. If we take our cue for love from the world, we will miss God's standard of love by a mile. Love begins with truth, flows out of truth, is bounded by truth, and must therefore always express truth. Truth is what the Bible says it is—know your Bible.

Not only Elder John, but all who love the truth love the lady and her kids in truth. He wrote, *And not only I, but also all who know the truth (v.1b)*. Christians often speak of the "common bond" we enjoy with each other. The common bond we have is the common salvation in Christ. That is the only way to get into the true Church. But we also love each other, understand each other, trust each other because we appeal to the same truth. Let a Christian deny the clear truth of the Bible and see what happens to fellowship.

We love in truth because truth abides in us. John wrote that we love other Christians *because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever (v.2)*. Abiding truth is active truth. There is no such thing as truth lying dormant in a Christian. If we know the truth, having learned the truth, but do not live according to the truth, it is not abiding in us. It seems strange how some people who call themselves Christians are not willing to live according to the truth even though they are sure that when they get to heaven living according to the Bible truth will be okay. We are so privileged to have God's standard, the standard for life in eternity, revealed to us now.

Because the truth is active within us, when we find fellow Christians living in truth it causes joy in our hearts. We are like John who said, *I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father (v.4)*. The apostle pointed out that the Father of the lady and her children commands us to walk in truth. Why does God need to command us for such an

acceptable thing? Is it right for one human to tell a fellow human how to live? What if the one human is the leader who constantly proclaims how we should live, but he does not measure up perfectly all the time? The commands of God's Word are accurate whether or not the leaders follow them. The teacher of the truth gives listeners of the truth reason not to live according to the truth when he is slack.

Some of the children actually walk in truth. In any local church there will be varied levels of walking in truth. By rights the older, mature Christians should have learned how truth applies to life and how to live out that truth. They should be examples to the younger Christians. Younger Christians are wise to understand that the experience of the mature Christians is valuable, and they don't have it yet. But, as is typical, in any local church there are those who walk in truth and those who do not.

Nevertheless, we can rejoice for those who do walk in truth. Notice who is applying the truth of the Bible to their lives. Nothing causes a pastor greater joy than seeing a sheep come to an understanding of Bible principle and applying that principle to life on their own simply by being taught by the Holy Spirit.

It is like a child who obeys the parents wishes without question. Does the child do it because that it convenient and results in receiving the parents love and attention? Or does the child obey because he or she is convinced the parent teaches and expects walking in truth? Do you live out Bible truth because God the Holy Spirit has taught you, or do you simply try to please the pastor, or your friends, or your parents?

To those who live in truth John wishes grace, mercy and peace. *Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love (v.3).* His threefold blessing is common. The elder desires for God to shower the loved ones with grace. Grace brings us to the Savior for salvation. Grace sustains us as we try to walk in truth.

The elder also desires for God to show His mercy to the loved ones. God's mercy takes pity on us. God's mercy withholds punishment we deserve. God's mercy, like the air we breath and the water we drink, is more valuable to us than we can imagine. We would not live long without God's mercy.

The elder desires for God to give peace to the loved ones. Peace is not the absence of strife which would be impossible in this world. Rather, the peace that God gives His beloved ones is quiet confidence in God even in the midst of upheaval.

These gifts, these blessings come from our God and Savior. All or each of these benefits are gifts from God. We are qualified to receive them only because of Christ's work in our behalf. These are just a few more of the blessings we receive from God who did not spare His own Son but along with Him generously gives us all things.

Notice that God gives these gifts within a particular setting. Every good gift God grants us will be in perfect harmony with truth and love. Therefore, God's blessings are often not what human lusts or even desires would ask for. In fact, gifts given in the context of truth and love might not appear as blessings—until later.

### **Keep On Keeping On (vv.5-6).**

Okay, that is a tired and hackneyed phrase, but it actually works well here. John told us to remember the good, old command (v.5). *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 (v.5).* This was simply an appeal to the important command from the first letter. Love of fellow Christians was an important argument throughout 1 John. It is the command Jesus gave the apostles. It is also the command that is rooted in God's character as John repeated, *“For God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16).*

The command is good. It is good enough that we, God's people, need to keep doing the old command. The phrase, “We love one another” is a present tense verb meaning it is supposed to be the characteristic of our lives. This is nothing new or novel. This is what we should be expected to do. This is what daily life should look like for us. Why?

We are supposed to be doing the command according to His commands. *And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it (v.6).* Living in love is living in obedience. John's argument from the first letter was that loving others was simply a matter of obeying Christ.

If we truly love Christ, we will do what He commands. If we truly love our parents, we will seek to obey their commands. If we truly love our spouse, we will try to do his/her desires (you really didn't think I was going to use the word "commands" there). If we truly love our boss or company, we will try to work according to the rules. This is not a radical idea. It's the kind of thing most humans do on some level in all of life.

Is anyone really surprised about this? John reminds us that loving each other because God loves us is simply to obey His commands. It is what we heard all our lives. So do it. But, about the time we decide we are going to live in truth and love, someone comes along and takes advantage of us. Thus, John's warning beginning in verse seven.

### **The World is Full of Liars (vv.7-11).**

The liars John refers to look like antichrists. *For 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 (v.7).* Most Christians will not argue against the fact that there are many deceivers in the world. The word *deceiver* comes from a Greek word that means to wander about without purpose, someone who is lost with no bearings or compass. This word then speaks of someone who purposely tries to get others off course, into a condition of wandering. That is the picture of the victim who denies truth, ignores truth, prefers not to live by truth. In spite of how intelligent they appear to be, they are actually wandering aimlessly. Because the world is populated primarily by deceived and deceiver alike, our lifestyle that is governed by God's truth is incomprehensible to them and often unacceptable.

There are deceivers who deny Christ's person and work. There are many different opinions about Jesus of Nazareth that do not line up with the true Bible statements about Him. Anyone who denies that Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh, the Christ who come to make atonement for sin, is a deceiver. John called them antichrists here and in the first letter.

Antichrist is a good term because to deny Christ is to be against Christ. No one who robs Christ of His deity loves Him, respects Him,

or is a follower of Him. This is the fallacy of false teachers today who teach that Jesus was the greatest of men, the greatest of teachers, a prophet of God, but not equal with God. They are against the One they say is great. They are anti—Christ.

They are different from you (v.9). *Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son (v.9).* John warns us here that to forsake Christ's teaching is a bad sign. The teaching of Christ is found only in the Bible. To cease to remain in it reveals that the person is an enemy of God.

Conversely, abiding in Christ's teaching is a good sign. To remain in the teaching of Christ proves that we are indwelt by God. The teaching of Christ can refer to the teaching that Christ taught (those are the red letters in some Bibles). Or it can also be the teaching about Christ which begins in Genesis one and is found all through the Bible until Revelation 22:21. No doubt the teaching of Christ is both. Holding fast to that truth proves we possess and are possessed by God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Because we remain in the teaching of Christ, there will be obvious differences between us and the antichrists of the world. They are out there by the millions. They will try to infiltrate the local churches. They will come to us and plead that if we are truly Christians we will love them. What should we do about it (vv. 8,10, 11).

John warned us to watch carefully that we don't lose our reward. *Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward (v.8).* The danger is real. We could lose our reward. That is the same warning we looked at last week from Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers. He warned, *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (2 Corinthians 5:10).* He also wrote, *Each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:13-15).*

How could we do something in regard to antichrists that would cause us to lose our reward? Why would God take away our reward? It happens when we are encouraging, validating, or identifying with false teachers. That is evil work. How could Christ reward us for helping those who deny Him and are His enemies? We can lose reward but not salvation.

Therefore, don't be nice to Christ-deniers. *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 (vv.10-11).* The question regards the person who shows up at the church meeting who denies any of the teaching about Jesus Christ in the Bible. Do not show hospitality to that person. Do not even be cordial. To be cordial is to participate. Tough rule? Yes. But critical for the Church's safe keeping. So John closed the letter by implying that maybe it would be good to talk about it and explain further.

### **Looking Forward to Completed Joy (vv.12-13).**

It is better to talk than text. John didn't say that, did he? Not exactly, but sort of. He informed his readers that he still had much to say or as he put it, *Though I have much to write to you (v.12a).* John always had more to write or say, but he was under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Remember in the Gospel by his name he wrote, *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).* Later in the book he wrote, *Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written (John 21:25).*

It should be a truism for all of us that we can never say too much about Christ. But talking face to face is better. That is what John meant when he wrote, *I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face (v.12b).* Talking face to face helps us communicate with the soul not just the mind. Joy is found when truth is received in the soul.

So share the joy. *The children of your elect sister greet you (v.13).* Who is the elect sister? Probably another church. That other church is also part of the Body of Christ. And the whole Body of Christ shares joy when it is obvious that Christians are living according to truth. That is the principle Paul taught when he wrote, *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together (1 Corinthians 12:26)*

There is no argument that love for fellow Christians is commanded. We should be characterized by keeping that command. We will discover much joy as we love others into Christlikeness. But because we love Christ supremely and Christ's people secondarily, we will be very careful how we deal with people who hate Christ. No matter how nice a person might appear to be, if he or she believes and teaches doctrine that denies the Bible teaching about Christ, they are enemies and should be treated as such. But not everyone is the enemy. Many people are confused about Christ – teach them. Many are confirmed antichrists – avoid them.