

# Love and Truth

*2 John: 1-13*

*With Study Questions*

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*2 John 1:1-13*

-The Elder, To the \_elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known \_\_the truth, <sup>-2-</sup> because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:

<sup>-3-</sup> \_\_Grace, mercy, *and* peace will be with \_you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

<sup>-4-</sup> I \_\_rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. <sup>-5-</sup> And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: \_\_that we love one another. <sup>-6-</sup> \_\_This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that \_as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

<sup>-7-</sup> For \_many deceivers have gone out into the world \_\_who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. \_\_This is a deceiver and an antichrist. <sup>-8-</sup> \_Look to yourselves, \_\_that \_\_we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* \_we may receive a full reward.

<sup>-9-</sup> \_\_Whoever \_\_transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. <sup>-10-</sup> If anyone comes to you and \_does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; <sup>-11-</sup> for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

<sup>-12-</sup> \_\_Having many things to write to you, I did not wish *to do so* with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, \_that our joy may be full.

<sup>-13-</sup> \_\_The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen (2 John: 1-13).

**THE ELDER, To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, <sup>2</sup> because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: <sup>3</sup> Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love” (2 John: 1-3).**

## **The Greeting**

I don't think it is terribly important discussing the way the author addresses himself or the recipient of the letter. If it is terribly important it is not terribly clear.

## **Elder**

John refers to himself as the elder rather than the apostle. It may simply have been because John was so old. It may have been because the personal nature of the epistle called for his actions as an elder rather than as an apostle. After all, there is nothing in this short epistle that is new (verse 5) and so John is not relying on any new revelation. His exhortation (which culminates in verses 11 and 12) is the type of exhortation any elder can and should make in any age.

## **Lady**

So who is the recipient of the letter? Some believe the lady to be just that. A Christian woman and the children are her natural children. This may be the case but verse four makes me think otherwise. The fact that John is rejoicing that some of her children were walking in the truth makes me think that it is a bigger assembly than one family. And since the church is, at times is referred to as a woman (John 3:29, Ephesians 5:25-33) it is a safe, albeit not conclusive, assumption that the letter is to a church.

## **Love and Truth**

Four times in the first three verses we see the word 'truth'. John says he loves the elect lady in truth, as do others who have known the truth. Verse two indicates that the reason those who know the truth, love in truth. It is because of the truth which abides in them—something

which is eternal. What we learn from this is that so far from love and truth being at odds with each other, there is actually a dependence of one on the other. True love is dependent upon truth. If we think about this for just a minute, it becomes obvious.

## Getty

In 1954 the richest man on earth was J. Paul Getty. He was married numerous times and had many children, in and out of wedlock. In an interview with Claus Von Bulow, one of Getty's executives, Von Bulow conveyed that once one of Getty's wives realized how low she was on his list of priorities, she would confront him. He would respond by saying, "I'll miss you honey." What is truly interesting and sad is Von Bulow's assessment of Getty's comment. He said something to the effect, "It wasn't that he didn't love her, he just had other priorities." But of course he didn't love her. He may have had some feelings but if we allow it to be defined as love, love becomes whatever we decide it is. And if that is the case, then love might as well be hatred.

## Love Minus Truth Equals Nothing

We must be careful not to speak of love as if it were a subjective thing. Affection, taste, desire, tact and passion may be subjective, but true *agape* love is objective. Love is a defined thing (read 1 Corinthians 13). Christians who press for doctrinal purity will often be accused of being unloving. But what the accuser often doesn't realize is that they have produced from their bowels a contrived view of what love actually is.

With all of John's talk of love, he is going to exhort his readers to do something in verses ten and eleven that most modern Christians would consider unacceptable and most certainly unloving. I think it is important to be nice. We shouldn't be accused of being unloving simply because we have a grumpy disposition. Yet, at the same time, we must realize that love apart from truth cannot even be defined and is reduced to nothing. A person who pits love against truth is not demonstrating true love because the Apostle Paul teaches us that "**love...rejoices in the truth**" (1 Corinthians 13:4, 6).

## A Precise Promise

In verse three we see a very precise promise we can count on because of the love and truth of the Father and the Son. Dissimilar to Paul's prayers of "peace be with you," John declares a fact. Grace, mercy and peace will be with Christians. In short, *grace* means God gives us what we don't deserve, namely all the riches of heaven (Ephesians 1:3). *Mercy* means God does not give us what we do deserve, namely judgment. *Peace*, both peace with God and eventually the peace of God will naturally follow.

**I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.<sup>5</sup> And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.<sup>6</sup> This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it (2 John: 4-6).**

## Rejoicing and Pleading

When John writes "**some of your children**" he isn't necessarily asserting that some others are walking in heresy, even though this might be the case. All we know for sure is that at least some (ones presumably that John knew about) were walking in truth—the truth which is consistent with the commands of God. This is something in which John greatly rejoiced, as should we. There are few things more wonderful than seeing the children embracing in and walking in the faith.

John was also pleading. He was pleading that they would continue to adhere to what they heard from the beginning. Faith in Christ and love for God reveals itself by obedience to the law of God. But the law of God apart from Christ is nothing but a death sentence. John therefore brings our attention to Christ—and not just Christ, but the true Christ.

**For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.<sup>8</sup> Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.<sup>9</sup> Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son (2 John: 7-9).**

## Many Deceivers

When John indicates the deceivers have gone out into the world, we should understand that they were at one time in the church (1 John 2:19). These are people who say they believe in Jesus—with some minor adjustments. And they are seeking to have influence in the church. In the same way Jesus threatens to vomit out the lukewarm, a sound church will vomit out the deceivers. For all the talk of the Antichrist being some sort of spooky political villain, John here teaches that those who assault the doctrine of Christ are the minions of the Antichrist are themselves antichrists (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3). In this respect we are still surrounded by antichrists.

## Self-Made Apostles

Robert Duvall starred in a movie called *The Apostle*. In this movie, he just decided one day that he would baptize himself as an apostle. From time to time I will have self-proclaimed apostles come into my office and proclaim what a great blessing our church will receive if we acquiesce to their divine wisdom. The sounder a church and its elders are in their understanding and embracing the sound “**doctrine of Christ**” as John puts, the sooner these bounders hit the exits and the purity of Christ’s church maintained. But this is not the end of them. Many will eventually find a platform for their heresy and seek to influence the church; we must be wise.

## Docetism

The particular heresy in question here revolved around a thing called docetism, which denied that Jesus actually came and lived in the flesh—that He was more of an apparition than a real man. But whatever the heresy might be, we must continually examine ourselves as to whether we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

## Full Reward

John does not want the church to lose the things they worked for and the full reward that follows the proclamation and embracing of the true Christ. Doctrinal purity might be a cold term for some people. But I

like to refer to this as the truth about Jesus. And when the church abandons the truth about Jesus there is much that can be lost. For when a church begins to compromise on the issue of doctrinal purity, it is only a matter of time before that compromise surfaces in the way of faith and behavior. And there is more than one church in history whose doctrine became so bad that they no longer would be considered churches at all.

**I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:9).**

## **Doctrine and Christ**

Verse nine is a sobering proclamation for those who downplay doctrine. First of all, it's a transgression, a sin. The idea of transgressing means to venture beyond established boundaries. This does not mean that my understanding of God cannot develop or progress. What it does mean is that if my understanding of godly things violates the biblical teachings or teaching of Christ, it is regression and not progression. And this type of regression has, as its final destination a religion absent of the true God.

If you don't have the doctrine of Christ, you don't have God; if you have you the doctrine, you have both the Father and the Son. So where does this leave your personal experience regarding God? A pilot may enjoy the staggering beauty of a breathtaking sunset as he flies his plane toward the horizon, but apart from instruments and a map he will eventually find himself hopelessly lost. The legitimacy of my personal experience with God must always be weighed against the authority of God's word, lest I find myself deceived.

So important is doctrinal purity that John is calling his readers to risk being called outright rude.

**If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;<sup>11</sup> for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds (2 John: 10,11).**

## **Calling Evil, Evil**

It came to my attention that at one of our Bible studies there was a moderately heated encounter. The teacher of the Bible study held a position which was consistent with the theology of our church, our confession, historic Protestant Christianity, and we believe (most importantly) the Holy Scriptures. He was confronted in the study by a visitor who openly denied Protestant Christianity and (at least as far as I can gather) sought to promote a brand of Christianity that every elder in our church would consider unbiblical.

Somewhere in the dialogue the visitor asked the teacher to assess his character, to which the teacher replied, (something to the effect) "I think you're an evil man." You might think this to be a violation of church growth strategy. But John gives instruction on how those who bring in false teaching are to be greeted. We should not view them with any less suspicion than one who would come into the body and contribute to the delinquency or corruption of God's children in any other evil way.

### **Misplaced Hospitality**

A misplaced hospitality may actually make us guilty by association. We might use different methods of obeying this admonition by John, but it is to be obeyed. God abhors false teachers. As Calvin states,

But if the impiety of some appear to us not otherwise than hopeless, as though the Lord pointed it out by the finger, we ought not to contend with the just judgment of God, or seek to be more merciful than he is.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, Calvin's Commentaries XXII (Baker Book House, reprinted 1993), p. 270.

Having many things to write to you, I did not wish *to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.*<sup>13</sup> The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen (2 John: 12,13).

## Pastoral Love

John had a pastoral love for those under his care. Sometimes I may get sick and it's not enough for my wife to convey their symptoms over the phone. I had to be there in person. The joy John writes of here may be very subjective. It should be the goal of those who spiritually mentor others to be a source of great joy and vice-versa.

## Questions for Study

1. It is not uncommon today for modern Christians to find a tension between love and truth. Is there truly a tension between love and truth?
2. All men and women everywhere know and embrace some form of love. But can love actually exist without truth?
3. If love does exist without truth, what is it? In other words, what does love become apart from truth?
4. What can Christians depend upon, based on the love and truth of God?
5. We seldom see the word "pleading" used by a writer in the New Testament. What is John pleading for Christians to do?
6. In what respects can Christians lose their full reward?
7. To what extent does sound doctrine equal Christianity? How valid is my personal experience?
8. Can Christians be guilty of great evil by being too hospitable?