

Love And Truth

2 John 1:1-13

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
6/25/2000*

Love And Truth

2 John 1:1-13

I. The Greeting

“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, ² because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: ³ 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 1:1-3).

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) are 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 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 "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; mercy means God does not give us what we do deserve, namely judgment; and peace, both peace with God and eventually the peace of God will naturally follow.

II. The Pleading

“I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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 1:4-6).

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. So in what was John rejoicing?

John was both rejoicing and pleading. And it simply amounts to a continued adherence to what they heard from the beginning. From time immemorial, even before the actual birth of Christ, faith in Christ evidenced itself by obedience to the law of God. It is so obvious it seems unnecessary to mention. Yet the old rule indicates “Repetition is the mother of learning.”

III. The Deceiving

“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. ⁸ Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward. ⁹ 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 1:7-9).

Gone Out

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). We must also understand that they still seek 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.

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 saunter into my office and proclaim what a great blessing our church will receive if we acquiesce to their divine wisdom. The sounder our church and elders are in our embracing of sound doctrine, the sooner these bounders hit the exits. But this is not the end of them. Many will eventually find a platform for their heresy and seek to influence the church.

Docetism

The particular heresy in question here revolved around a thing called docetism, which denied that Jesus actually came and lived in the flesh. 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

The full reward is an interesting term. John seems to indicate that we might not receive it. As good Calvinists we realize the salvation is gratuitous and the truly saved will persevere to the end. The danger here is to assume, therefore, that doctrinal purity is not important. But 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 should no longer be considered churches at all but rather bastions of damnation.

“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 Equals Christianity

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 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.

IV. The Disassociating

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; ¹¹ for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 1:10,11).

Calling Evil, Evil

It came to my attention that at one of our Bible studies just recently 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.

The visitor queried the teacher as to his assessment of 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 all have our own different methods of obeying this admonition by John, but it is to be obeyed. Remember, the most vehement diatribes in scripture are not written against adulterers or thieves but against 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.”¹

V. The Closing

“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. ¹³ The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen” (2 John 1:12,13).

John had a pastoral love for those under his care. My little girl was recently sick and it wasn't enough for my wife to convey her 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.

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

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. Some Christians fear they might lose their salvation. Others are perhaps overly confident that they are in no danger of losing anything whatsoever. 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?