

Route Sixty-Six

Part Sixty-Three

2 John

You're Not Invited

(John 5:39; 2 John 5; 2 John 10, 11)

With Study Questions

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You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

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 (2 John 5).

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 10, 11).

Introduction

The man leading the Bible study was one of the most theologically savvy, intellectually gifted, yet gentle and humble people I had ever known. He exceeded most of the seminary professors I had ever studied under. Yet here was, a member of our church, leading a Bible study. But in one particular study, something happened that resulted in me getting a phone call by a visitor, a lawyer, who also happened to be an acquaintance of mine. He was very disgruntled at the way he was treated.

After a little investigating, I unearthed what transpired. My visitor/acquaintance did not attend the Bible study merely to learn or grow. He attended with the clear intention of influencing. And the doctrine which he was seeking to foist upon the study was one that we, as a church, would have held to be unbiblical and unorthodox; something that was not in the spiritual best interests of those in attendance.

When the Bible study leader perceived the direction the visitor was seeking to take, he addressed the doctrine, and the person seeking to promote the doctrine, in unvarnished tones; tones that many within the bosom of modern, western Christianity would view as inconsistent with

the sweet flavor and sensibilities of religion to which we have grown accustomed. This Bible study leader believed that he not only had a responsibility to address a predatory doctrine, but the predator who was seeking to bring it.

I couldn't help but think of this encounter as I read 2 John. Separated by a mere four verses is the call to **"love one another"** (2 John 5b) and the call to **"not receive"** someone into your house or **"greet him"** (2 John 10b, 11a). How do we square...

Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels (Hebrews 13:1, 2).

With...

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned (Titus 3:10, 11).

Most of us in this room might agree that a church that is overly *seeker centered* may find itself in dangerous territory. At the same time, being sensitive to a seeker (or more aptly, a visitor) is only reasonable. The visitor should have some idea of what's going on. The Apostle Paul is very clear that if an **"unbeliever or outsider"** (1 Corinthians 14:24) enters the church, they need to grasp the event. He goes so far as to say it should be **"easy to understand"** (1 Corinthians 14:9). All to say that we shouldn't center the service on a seeker, but we shouldn't ignore or be hostile to the seeker. *Seeker hostile* churches aren't good.

Yet in this brief epistle we read these counter-intuitive words not to receive certain people or even greet them! That appears to be another category altogether; and a critical one at that. This goes well beyond the normal seeker type categories.

Survey of 2 John

Since we have such a brief epistle, I thought it would be profitable to inch into the answer of this unique issue through a verse by verse

overview. Digging too deeply will not be possible given our time restraints, but we can certainly get the general ideas contained; stopping to highlight issues that may need emphasis in our current spiritual environment. Let us begin.

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 (2 John 1, 2).

John, the likely author, refers to himself as “**The Elder**”. This is a bit of a different autograph. In the over sixty times the word ‘elder’ *presbyteros* is used in the New Testament, only about three times do we see it in the singular. And never in the singular when discussing ruling or authority. It is very possible that John is using the word here to describe his age rather than his office. The critical message for today’s church in this greeting is for us to recognize that the church is to be governed by a plurality of elders, not a single person.

The “**elect lady**” may be an actual woman and her family or a reference to a church. 2 John 13 tends to favor the latter but not explicitly.

The second thing we notice is the repetition of the word “**truth**” *alethia*. From time to time we see an argument in Christian circles between truth and love. We must recognize that both attributes are an extension of the character of God. God is love and God is truth (John 14:6; 1 John 4:8).

And, it must be stated, apart from the acknowledgement of a divine, absolute source, the two words are reduced the meaninglessness. Simply, and biblically, stated, truth without love makes us a clanging cymbal and love without truth is generally pure carnality or idolatry.

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 3).

These greetings become so common that we tend to, at our own expense, ignore them. It is within a very substantial and defined love and truth from the Lord Jesus Christ that we have “**grace, mercy, and peace.**” Tackling these august words in a couple of sentences feels overwhelming. Briefly stated, grace means we freely receive that which we have not

earned (the riches of life, light, heaven and favor with God). Mercy means we do not receive that which we do deserve (death, wrath, torment and eternal disfavor with God). And peace can mean two things: peace with God (purchased by the blood of Christ) and the peace of God (which comes as we meditate upon what has been done for us. It is a glorious greeting!

I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received a 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 4-6).

John, as should we, rejoiced when he saw the next generation walking in truth; especially in the increasingly hostile environment confronting the first century church. A point of emphasis here that we should **“love one another”**. That may be obvious but should ever be stated and pursued. What is not obvious, at least in today’s religious environment, is that love is defined by **“walking according to His commandments.”**

Fallen creatures will ever seek to pervert the gifts of God which are most beautiful; love at the very top of the list. Of course, love goes beyond the mere external obedience of commandments. But to ignore the commandments in our relationships with God, and one another, is an objective and explicit display of a lack of love. If I am lying to you, about you, or stealing from you or unfaithful to you, I cannot, at the same time say I am loving you.

The commandments might be said to be the framing or substance of love. 1 Corinthians 13 (the well-known love chapter) is the finished carpentry, interior design and texture of love. We should pursue both with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30).

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 (2 John 7, 8).

We have discussed in 1 John the continual effort of the spirit of antichrist to transform Christ into something other than who or what He is (1 John 2; 4). John firmly resists the notion that Jesus is merely an idea or an inspirational character. Jesus is the Christ, the eternal Son of God made flesh. He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross and rose again to justify sinners.

John is fortifying that a church which loses this message will have lost **“those things we worked for.”** He is not speaking here of the individual loss of regeneration (a teaching the Scriptures do not allow). He seems to be addressing here the light and saltiness of the church. There is an argument that since less than pure churches (which all churches are) contain saved people, we should quit addressing our disagreements in the name of peace. This is a dangerous and unbiblical argument (1 Corinthians 11:19).

If Christians quit contending for the truth (Jude 3) in the churches, the only ones contending will be the **“false teachers” (2 Peter 2:1)**. These **“wells without water” (2 Peter 2:17)** have made great strides in major denominations during our generation.

Whether by **“full reward”** he is speaking of heavenly gifts or the reward of a fruitful ministry, it is difficult to say. Either would be worth the effort. John then presses the issue of deceivers and the danger they pose to the church. There were, little doubt, people who had believed the deceivers. John provides a way to evaluate.

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. ¹⁰ 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 9-11).

Three times in three verses we see the word **“doctrine”** or **“teaching”** *didache*. Twice it is stated as the **“doctrine of Christ”**. The anti-propositional and anti-intellectual, post-modern system of approaching life and truth is a creepy intruder in the church. The denial and attack upon

objective reality, truth, morality, reason, language, etc. is a cultural phenomenon which has found its way into the way we interact with Scripture, the church, each other and God.

An analysis of this methodology, of course, pushes us to a bended knee before the altar of the postmodernist who will tell us, in no uncertain terms, what the new reality is, or should be. In the meantime, we should (as every Disney movie repetitively teaches) follow our hearts, rather than cold and lifeless doctrine—even the doctrine of Christ.

Be it known, that people who want things like truth, love, morality and even religion to remain cryptic, are people who want you to engage in, and dedicate your allegiance to, that which is undefined and unexamined. This folly has led our culture into the mess that it currently is. Heaven help us if the church follows suit. Truth loves a definition and will never be offended by a healthy critique (Acts 17:11). What we are all called to critique is whether or not what we're hearing is the **"doctrine of Christ."** The source for this, as we learned in 1 John are the Scriptures (1 John 4:6).

Apart from the doctrine of Christ, John teaches, we have neither the Father nor the Son.

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also (1 John 2:23).

There is a great deal of talk about whether or not the major world religions serve the same God, whether they have Christ or not. This appears to answer that question.

This brings us back to our Bible study leader and his uncompromising (some might call it harsh) treatment of his would be pedagogical (teaching) guest. It appears so inhospitable to **"not receive him into your house nor greet him."** John's concern here seems to be that our favorable interaction with the promoter of false teaching would demonstrate a tacit approval of his doctrine, causing us to **"share in his evil deeds."**

A few quick points need to be made as we conclude: Firstly, I don't think John is addressing basic pleasantries. Although it may be a bit of a social challenge, it is possible to vehemently reject the person and their teaching, while at the same time extending an olive branch of peace.

Some might question the very personal affront toward the person rather than merely the false teaching they seek to bring. But if I show up in

a hospital seeking to treat patients, the staff and patients need to know more than the fact that my medicinal recommendations are likely to put them in the morgue. They need to recognize me, that I am a medically dangerous person who is not to be trusted.

Secondly, the ability to efficiently obey what John is calling us to do requires the church have a well-thought-out understanding of what the Scriptures teach. The worst heretics in history had Bibles in their hands. A church that will not convey in some confessional form what they believe the Bible teaches can be more dangerous than a church that has rejected the Bible altogether.

Finally, there is a recognition that a **“little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5:6)**. It is the continual duty of a sound, biblical church to recognize that **“a little folly”** gives a **“foul order”** to the **“perfumers ointment” (Ecclesiastes 10:1)**. A little poison in a cup of water can render the entire drink poisonous.

John concludes with a farewell that has taken on new significance for almost every churchgoer I know.

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 12, 13).

Even in a world (unlike the time of the writing of this epistle) where we have virtually unlimited access to books, music, entertainment and electronic social interaction within the boundaries of our own home, there is simply nothing like **“face to face”** (literally mouth to mouth). It is an impediment to the fullness of joy when our fellowship is restricted as it has been this past year. Let us continue to pray and work toward having full access to the means of grace which God has provided for our welfare.

Questions for Study

1. Have you ever had a challenging experience in church or a Bible study when it came to social interaction? Was it justified? Why or why not (pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss the ups and downs of seeker sensibilities in today's church (pages 3, 4).
3. What is the primary means by which Christ governs His church? Why is this critical (page 4)?
4. Analyze the war between truth and love. Are they enemies? Are they mutually exclusive or interdependent? How so (page 4)?
5. Define and discuss grace, mercy and peace (pages 4, 5).
6. How do we know if we're truly loving somebody (page 5)?
7. What does the spirit of antichrist seek to do (pages 5, 6)?
8. Should churches/Christians avoid disagreement no matter what? Why or why not (page 6)?
9. Gives reasons why the "doctrine of Christ" is so important (pages 6, 7).
10. How do we, as hospitable Christians, explain John's admonition to not receive or greet certain people (pages 7, 8)?