

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN

May 11, 1992

2 John 1-13

Intro: 2 John and 3 John are the shortest books in the NT, each containing less than 300 words in the Greek text. We can tell that they are clearly pastoral in character. There is little doubt but that they were written by the Apostle John. 2 John was written to a lady; 3 John was written to a man. But exactly who they were, and where they lived, we do not know. It seems most likely that they were written by the Apostle John before his exile to the Isle of Patmos where he wrote The Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. There is some possibility that these shorter epistles were written as a postscript to 1 John, but we cannot be sure. So there is much about these epistles that we do not know. However, what we do not know does not keep us from benefiting greatly from the two letters. The absence of these details is not essential for us to understand what John wrote.

We can be sure that John knew those to whom he was writing. We can be equally sure that they knew who was writing to them. Therefore, it was not necessary for the details which we would like to know to be mentioned to the people who first received these letters. If such details were important, the Holy Spirit would have given them to us. But the absence of the writer's name, and of the positive identification and address of those to whom he was writing, gives a timelessness to the letters, and makes us focus upon the message of each letter as though they were written for us today.

By reading the two epistles we can see that in the first, John was concerned about trouble coming in from the outside. In the second he was concerned about trouble arising from the inside. It seems that in 2 John he was concerned about "the elect lady and her children," i.e., her and her family. In 3 John, although written to a man by the name of Gaius, John seems to have been concerned about the church of which Gaius was a member, possibly an elder. In 2 John the emphasis is upon the truth; in 3 John the emphasis is upon love. John mentioned the truth five times in the first four verses of 2 John. But he spoke also of the commandments as well as of doctrine. The word "doctrine" appears three times in verses 9 and 10. Therefore, we can say that John's emphasis with the elect lady and her children was upon the importance of the Word of God, with special attention given to the teaching of Christ and/or what the Word of God teaches about Christ. We will see more about this as we come to it in the epistle.

It is very easy to see the divisions in 2 John:

- 1) The Introduction, or Salutation (vv. 1-3).
- 2) The Message of the Epistle (vv. 4-11).
- 2) The Conclusion (vv. 12, 13).

I. THE INTRODUCTION (2 John 1-3).

(Read.)

V. 1 Many have wondered why John did not identify himself as an apostle.

He was the last surviving member of the twelve, and such a letter as he wrote was the kind that you would expect an apostle to write.

We can only speculate as to the answer to that question. "Elder" originally meant an older person, and we know that John was very old at this time. That could have been the reason that he used that title. But it is probably more likely that he was writing as a pastor. This elect lady may

have been in the church at Ephesus where reliable tradition tells us that the Apostle John ministered for several years. If so, that is all the more reason he spoke of himself as "elder." Although he was not at that time in that position, yet he continued to be concerned about the elect lady and her children.

He called her "the elect lady." I don't think that we can take this as meaning anything less than that John considered her a true child of God, one who had been chosen for salvation. He could call her "elect" because he had seen evidence in her life which convinced him that she really knew the Lord.

Then from what he wrote in the latter part of verse 1 it would seem that this lady was not only well-known, but well-loved--well-loved by all of those who knew her, and who knew the truth!

John was not talking about her reputation in the world, but among believers. But he began his letter by emphasizing that which would turn out to be his reason for writing to her.

Verse 2 continued this emphasis.

V. 2 Believers loved this elect lady because of what the truth had done in her life. It was dwelling in all true believers, and would be with them forever!

Many of you have heard me tell of a fellow-student of mine in Dallas Seminary who wrote his master's thesis on the subject that every believer is permanently indwelt by all three Persons of the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I am firmly convinced that he was right. But here is an indwelling that we do not here much about these days: the indwelling of the Word of God!

Cf. what Paul said in Rom. 10:6-10. When the Lord saves a person He writes the Word of God upon that person's heart--and it is there forever!

This does not mean that we know all of the Word, nor that we can quote long passages of Scripture as soon as we are saved. But it does mean that when ever a person is saved, the truth of the Word of God, as well as the conviction that it is the Word, has been written in part upon the heart of that person. That is why a true Christian is interested in reading the Bible, and in learning more about the Word of God. And John said, in effect, that nobody will ever be able to get the Word out of our hearts. It seems that it would have been impossible for John to say what he said in any other way so as to demonstrate how important the Word of God is to every child of God! Any person who attacks the Word by questioning it, or denying it, will immediately draw protests from those who know the truth. John was saying that this was the way he felt, and that this was the way "the elect lady" felt, and her children felt the same way.

All of this was by way of introduction. And all of what we have read so far was very commendatory.

And this leads specifically to his greeting:

V. 3 This was not only a greeting; it was a prayer. It is the usual greeting given to individuals. See Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. Regardless of how long we have known the Lord, or how well, we

never get beyond our need for the grace of God, the mercy of God, and the peace of God.

And the fact that we have an inexhaustible supply of each one is seen in the fact that they come "from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father." Here is another hint of what was on the heart of John which caused him to write this letter. He spoke of "the Son of the Father," and then added, "in truth and love."

From 2 and 3 John we are going to see that the child of God needs to be always concerned about these two things: the truth, and love. We need both, but we need them in their proper relationship to each other.

Now we come to the main message of the epistle:

II. THE MESSAGE (2 John 4-11).

V. 4 Compare this verse with verse 4 of 3 John. Nothing delighted the Apostle John any more than to know that those to whom he had ministered in the past were walking in the truth. Nothing gives me greater joy about the people to whom I have ministered. This is not only evidence of a person's salvation, but of their progress in the life of faith.

"Walking" is a Hebraism, that is, it comes into the NT from the OT, and it refers to the whole conduct of a person's life. To walk in the truth is to have one's life directed and controlled by the Word of God. And they were doing it out of obedience to the Father.

This is evidence not only of the fruitfulness of John's ministry, but of the fruitfulness of the elect lady's ministry. Her husband is not mentioned in this epistle. Some feel that this would mean that she was a widow, or possibly a Christian lady whose husband was not a believer. Whatever the case might be, God had used her in the lives of her children. This ought to be an encouragement to all of us, and especially to those who are raising their children without the help of a spouse. The effect of our work with our children is seen not in how many verses they can quote, nor in how much doctrine they may know (although these things are very important). "The bottom line," as so many are saying today, is the way our children live! Do they know the Lord? If so, they will show it in their walk as much as in their talk.

V. 5 At least one present-day writer I know of does not like the word balanced in relation to the Christian life, and/or Christian truth. But I have no objection to it. In fact, I think balance is greatly needed.

We have already seen John's concern for truth and love. And we will continue to see this throughout this epistle and also in 3 John.

Here in this epistle John was emphasizing the importance of the truth, but he did not want to minimize the importance of love among the people of God. And so he stressed the importance of our love for each other in this verse. But he wanted to make sure that this elect lady would not lose sight of the true nature of Christian love. Love for a Christian never ignores the truth, but love is always to be exercised within the limits of the truth.

This is what he emphasized in verse 6.

V. 6 No person can truly claim to love God who does not keep His command-

ments. Our Lord made that very clear to His disciples in the Upper Room. Cf. John 14:21-23. If a person claims to love God, let him show his love by walking in the truth, or, as it is stated here, but walking in the commandments of the Lord. A person who is disobedient to the Word of God throws all kinds of doubt upon his or her relationship with the Lord.

Do you remember how the Lord concluded His Sermon on the Mount? (Read Matt. 7:21-23.)

And as John went on to explain in this sixth verse, as he had in verse 5, the commandments he was talking about were not some new revelation, but the very same truths which they had heard "from the beginning." I take this to mean "from the beginning" of their knowledge of the Gospel and their relationship with the Lord. Beware of the people who come with new commandments, new doctrines, claims of later revelations. God has given us in His Word all of the divine truth that He expects us to know and to obey. Only a false teacher would try to change, or eliminate, or add to the Word of God.

V. 7 It becomes clear in this verse that John was concerned about false teachers who evidently were coming to the house of "the elect lady," but they were saying something very different about Jesus Christ than what the Word of God teaches, and different from what the elect lady had learned from the Apostle John. They were denying the incarnation of our Lord. John did not say in what way they were denying it, but simply that they were denying it. They may have been denying our Lord's true humanity. That false teaching, we know, was affecting the first century church. Or, they may have been saying that the Lord was not really the Lord; He was must a man.

When anybody teaches anything less than the perfect humanity of our Lord, or His absolute Deity, make sure that you are listening to "a deceiver and an antichrist."

What is "a deceiver"?

A deceiver is one who is not a teacher of the truth, but a teacher of error. And his purpose is to draw you away from the truth of the Word of God. He does not tell you that is what he is doing. In fact, he will tell you that he has the truth. The only way we can recognize a deceiver is by being acquainted with the Word of God. The false teacher has a field day with ignorant Christians.

A deceiver is also "an antichrist." He is not the Antichrist, but he is "an antichrist." What does antichrist mean?

Archbishop Trench in his excellent book, Synonyms of the New Testament, pp. 105-108, has an excellent description of this word antichrist. He is a person who, either in part or in the whole, resists and opposes what the Word of God teaches about Christ, and/or the things that the Lord taught.

And note at the beginning of this verse that John said that even then there were "many deceivers" in the world--active and successful in drawing the professing people of God away from the Lord.

V. 8 John exhorted the elect lady and her children with the words, "Look to yourselves." We need to be concerned about others, but we cannot help others if we get off of the track ourselves.

And Paul's warning was this--slightly different from what we have in the KJV: "...that **ye** lose not those things which we have wrought, but that **ye** receive a full reward."

This is a good place for us to remind ourselves of what Paul told the Corinthian church: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). We all need to be constantly on guard. John was not writing to a novice when he wrote to "the elect lady." She was a mature believer. Therefore, wherever we are in the scale of spiritual growth, mature or immature, we need to be careful about the teaching we listen to.

And then John gave a wonderful test to apply to every teacher that you hear, and to every book or article about the truth which you read. See it in verse 9:

V. 9 To transgress is to step over the line. The boundary of truth is set by what the Scriptures teach about Christ, as well as by what Christ Himself taught.

A deceiver may use a lot of truth, but if he is wrong about Christ, he does not have God. He is an impostor. He is a seducer. And he needed to be avoided like poison because he is poison. Teachers can be so subtle on this point that people are often snared without really knowing what they are getting into.

On the other hand, the person who is right about Christ, is also right about God, and possesses both!

You and I don't have the time to investigate every doctrine that is making its way among us today, but this simple test can say us much heartache and lost time.

How can you and I know the doctrine of Christ? By getting well acquainted with what our Bibles have to say about Him.

Now John followed this with positive instruction regarding the false teacher. See the next verse.

V. 10 John was not saying that you are not to talk to a Jehovah's Witness who comes to your door. What he was saying is that you are not to let him in to your house for a Bible study, nor are you to offer him hospitality, nor are you to give money to help support him and his organization. All of this is included in what John had to say. Even be careful about giving such teachers too much time at your front door.

Then notice verse 11:

V. 11 The person who helps the false teacher is helping to keep his false teaching and deceptive practices alive. You will share in his judgment, and might even see some members of your family deceived by him.

With this John's message is finished. He said what he needed to say. He did not go into detail in what he said. But there is no doubt but that he was greatly concerned that the Devil by his emissaries would turn this family away which had shown such great progress in the things of God. Whenever you see the blessing of the Lord in your own life, or in the life of some other believer, be on the lookout for the work of the Enemy. He

will do all that he can to turn that growing Christian away from Christ and away from the Word of God.

And so we come to:

III. THE CONCLUSION (2 John 12, 13).

V. 12 John didn't write more because he expected to see them soon where he could speak to them in person. And his purpose in coming was "that our joy may be full." Some MSS say, "Your joy." Whichever may be the correct reading, the point is that false teaching never brings joy to us; in fact, it robs us of our joy. Our joy is dependent upon Christ--Who He is, what He has done, and what He taught. Our only source of the truth concerning Christ is in the Word. Let us read it, hear it, believe it, trust in it, and obey it!

Our responsibility before God is to love each other. But let us remember that our love must remain within the limits of the truth. Just because a person uses Scripture, or seems to be a sincere person, does not mean that he is a true teacher of the truth. Listen to what he says about Christ, and measure that with what the Word says. If he says what the Word says, then you can have fellowship with him. If not, have nothing to do with him.

V. 13 Evidently John was where the elect lady's nephews lived. It may have been through them that he learned about the dangers their aunt was facing. How gracious the Lord was to let John know what was going on, regardless of what the source may have been.

Next week, the Lord willing, we will consider together 3 John.