

THE PRIORITY OF THE TRUTH

2 John 1-13

Intro: There are five one-chapter books in the Bible – one in the OT, the book of Obadiah; four in the NT, Philemon, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude. Of these five, 2 and 3 John are the shortest.

We speak of all of the NT books from Romans to Jude as epistles, or letters. And this is a correct designation for them. But as we think of letters, the one-chapter epistles are more like what we would call letters. The larger books like Romans, 1 Corinthians, and so on, are more like what John Stott calls *a treatise*. However, in all of the writings of the NT there is definitely a personal emphasis so that when we go them we all have the feeling that they were written just for us.

Expositors differ as to whether 2 John was written to an individual, or to a church addressed as a lady. I personally believe it was written to a lady, whom John does not name. But that should not bother us because in the whole First Epistle of John he mentioned no one by name. It was written to a group of believers somewhere, but we are not told where.

The fact that 3 John is written to a man (and he is named), Gaius, adds to my belief that 2 John was written to an unnamed lady. The Apostle John was acquainted with her and with some of her children. So I believe that in addressing a lady, and then a man, the Apostle John was addressing both women and men, pointing out the tendency in each group which needs to be guarded against.

Whether this elect lady and Gaius were members of the same group who received the first epistle, no one can say for sure. But there is a strong possibility, I believe, that they were. From both 2 and 3 John we can see that there were certain internal problems facing believers in the early church, and women were in danger of making one mistake in dealing with some teachers, while men were in danger of making another mistake. Today, in looking at 2 John, we will see the mistake that this elect lady was apparently inclined to make. When we get to 3 John we will see the mistake which men are most inclined to make. However, there are men who make the mistake that this elect lady was in danger of making, and, likewise, when we come to 3 John, we will recognize that sometimes ladies tend to make the mistake which is more characteristic of men.

I plan to get to 3 John two weeks from today after our week with Dr. Jerry Bridges which we are all looking forward to.

I don't know if you all have read this epistle in the past week because I have not said much, if anything, publicly about what I intended to do when I completed

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First John. I have talked to a few of you about it, particularly the men. But just so we will all have it fresh in our minds, I want to begin by reading the entire epistle. It only has thirteen verses and can be read through in just a few minutes. But it is a delightful epistle which, as I have suggested, was written to a lady for ladies and girls, and yet very important for men and boys to read and to understand.

Before I read it I want to call your attention to the Apostle John's focus on "the truth" and on "the doctrine of Christ." When John mentions "the truth" he is speaking about the Bible, the truth that God has given us in the Word of God. And when he speaks of "the doctrine of Christ" he has in mind what the Bible teaches of our Lord. And he is assuming that the lady to whom he was writing was well taught in the Scriptures, well taught in the teachings of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I believe that she was. Her life and her love for the truth of God spoke positive evidence that she knew the Lord and loved the Lord very much.

But let me read the epistle, and then we will consider together what the Apostle John had to say to this dear lady. We can all expect to find out who she is when we get to heaven.

(Read 2 John.)

The epistle has three parts to it:

- 1) The Apostle John's greeting in verses 1-4.
- 2) The Apostle's main message in verses 5-11.
- 3) The Apostle's concluding words in verses 12-13.

I. THE APOSTLE JOHN'S GREETING (2 John 1-4).

Both in this epistle and in 3 John, the Apostle John identifies himself as an "elder." He used this term, not to indicate that he was older than this "elect lady," which he obviously was, but to indicate his position in the church, just like Peter did in 1 Peter 5:1.

The Apostle John, like Peter, was also an elder, and as an elder was also overseer of the church. The position of the apostles was undoubtedly greater than that of elders, or overseers in local churches, but one of the best descriptions of the office of an elder was given by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5:1-4 to which I referred just a moment ago. Another important passage dealing with elders is in Acts 20:17-35. But since the passage in 1 Peter 5 is shorter, let me read what Peter said was his responsibility as an elder, and therefore the responsibility of all elders. Here are Peter's words:

1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that

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shall be revealed:

2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Peter 5:1-4).

So elders are to “feed the flock of God,” and by this Peter meant that they were to do all that a shepherd does for his sheep, teaching them, guiding them, protecting them, doing all he can to safeguard sheep from their natural enemies.

From verse 1 we can easily see that to the Apostle John, the truth of God’s Word set the boundaries of the love that believers have for each other. That was his message in 1 John. We have a special obligation to love all who love the truth of God’s Word, divinely inspired truth, the Word of God which is forever settled in heaven. This is why it is so important for people who claim to know Jesus Christ as their Savior to be increasing every day in their knowledge of the Word of God. As long as we live we are to keep learning Scripture, and especially what it teaches about our Lord Jesus Christ. As we learn about Him, we are learning about God and we are learning about the Holy Spirit. It is the Word that teaches us the place that God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are to have in our lives.

Notice what John said in verse 2. It is the truth that now is to be dwelling in us, and will be with us forever! This is another way that John had of describing a true child of God. When the Lord saves us He establishes a living relationship between us and the Word of God.

Then John gave his greeting. All three of these words, grace, mercy, and peace, are precious truths which were brought into our lives by the Gospel. They came from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ when we were first saved, and they continue to come day by day from the same sources. And we learn this from the Word. The more we have of the Word, the more we will experience God’s grace. The more we have of the Word, the more we will experience God’s mercy. And the more we have of the Word, the more we will experience the peace of God. We would do well to spend this morning right here and go no farther.

And then look at verse 4. What was it that brought great joy to this old apostle’s heart? He had met some place with this dear lady’s children, and found them “walking in the truth.” It was not that they changed when they saw the Apostle John coming. He found them doing what they had been doing before the Apostle found them. What a testimony to this elect lady, that her

children were following in her footsteps!

Now in verse 5 we come to:

II. THE APOSTLE'S PRIMARY PURPOSE IN WRITING (2 John 5-11).

His first words were words of encouragement.

He was not writing to tell her something that she did not already know, but he recognized that what the Lord's people are to be doing in their relationships with each other, she was doing and had been doing as her way of life. She loved the Lord's people. And he was encouraging her to keep on loving the people of God. It is second only to loving God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

But then he expressed to her (what I feel sure that she already knew), that what gives delight and blessing to the love that we as believers have for each other, is that we are all seeking to keep the commandments of the Lord which we find all through the Word of God. This is what keeps our love vital and real. Whenever there is trouble between two Christians, whether it is between Christian friends, or between a husband and wife, or between a parent and child, you will always find that somebody, some-where along the line, has become careless about obedience to the Lord. If we are on the outs with others who know the Lord, we need to go back to take a good look at our relationship with the Lord. Somewhere disobedience has come in.

So the Apostle John was emphasizing with this dear lady that we need to be continually aware of our need to love each other in the Lord, and our love is maintained by daily obedience to the Lord. And our obedience must come from the heart. It includes not only what we do, but the way we talk, the way we think, things inward as well as things outward.

Now men, I think you will have to agree with me when I say that ladies surpass us usually when it come to love for the saints, and often even in their desire to obey the Lord. I know of lots of ladies who have been an example to me by their tenderness toward people in their desire to please the Lord. With me, that begins with my wife, but it also includes many of you ladies who are here this morning. Twice recently I have received letters from ladies who say they are interested in coming to Trinity, but they want to know if there is an opportunity for ministry for them here. We believe that the teaching ministry in the church is the work of godly men, but all anyone has to do to have a ministry is just to walk with the Lord and love His people, and all kinds of opportunities for ministry will open up.

But what danger did this elect lady? In her desire to show love to people, she might be in danger of showing love to the wrong people. Look at verse 7. We live in a world of deceivers, and some of these deceivers, the ones we need to beware of, use the Bible, and they even speak of Christ, but they do not say just those things that the Bible tells us about Christ. *They will not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. It is what they don't say about Christ is what sound a warning to us. If Jesus Christ is not God manifest in the flesh, then we have no Savior. The person who denies this, denies the Deity of Jesus Christ, and also denies His true and perfect humanity!* The person may say some good things about our Lord's works and His teaching, but they are denying the Gospel of the grace of God. What could be worse? Follow such teachers and there is no telling where it will lead you.

In verse 8 the Apostle John says that instead of listening to such teachers, we need to take a good look at ourselves, and especially look at the truth which we have been taught by teachers who have taught us the Word of God. And beware that you don't turn away from the teaching you have received from the Word of God. And this led John to say what he did in verse 9, a verse which ought to be printed in bold, capital letters. Look at what it says.

The verb translated "transgresseth" is a word which means *to go forward*. The NASB translates it, "Anyone who goes to far." They do not abide by what the Bible teaches about Christ. They go beyond divine revelation. And their addition is a contradiction of the clear teaching of Scripture. What did John say about them? He said that ***they don't have God!*** They like to make you think that they are very wise and have superior wisdom, but anyone who does not teach what the Bible teaches about Christ, is a deceiving and deceived fool!

This makes it extremely important that we know what the Bible teaches about Christ. It is not going to do us any good if it is in the Bible unless what is in the Bible gets into our hearts. Never minimize the importance of the teaching of the Word of God. The professing church today has turned away from the teaching of God's Word. Pastors have surrendered to those who want to be entertained instead of those who want to learn the truth of God's Word.

So what did the Apostle John advise this elect lady to do?

There were no good hotels or models in NT times. There were inns which were not clean but usually infested with all kinds of vermin. So as men like Paul and Peter and John moved around from place to place, teaching the people of God, the Lord's people opened their homes to them, and gave them a place to sleep and food to eat. False teachers saw this also as an opportunity for free board and room, but also for an opportunity to get money from the Lord's people.

The Apostle John's word to this elect lady is given in verse 10 and 11. These

words apply just as much to us today as they did to the people of God in those days. Our love does not extend to such people. If you and I give to them, or provide for them in any way, even to wishing them a good day, we are supporting their evil deeds. They are emissaries of the Devil, and those who follow their teaching will eventually find themselves in hell.

Now why did the Apostle John say this to an “elect lady.” I think it is because ladies have a special tendency to be deceived. Twice in the NT the Apostle Paul mentioned that Eve was deceived. There is such a tenderness in the hearts of women, such a desire to get along with everyone, such a hope that even false teachers can be converted, that love, kindness, a desire to make everyone happy, may take precedence over the truth. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:2 and 3,

2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

The word “simplicity” is translated in the ESV as “a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Paul’s words here were not just spoken to the ladies, but he did say that Eve was “beguiled,” meaning *deceived*.

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy he had this to say about Eve:

13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression (1 Tim. 2:13-14).

Some women feel that Paul was still suffering from the rabbinic teaching that he had received as a Pharisee. But those of us who truly believe that the Bible is inspired by God, cannot accept that explanation. He was simply stating a fact.

This does not mean that men are never deceived, because they are. And it does not mean that all women are deceived. Obviously they are not. But it does point to the reason why God put the man in the position of greater responsibility over the woman. A woman’s tenderness will often cause her to make more allowance for a false teacher. Paul told Christian women in 1 Corinthians 14:35, that “if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home . . .” If a woman is not married, she can go to the church leaders or any other godly man who could advise her from the Word. But all of this puts every Christian man under a burden to know his Bible.

Now we come to:

III. THE APOSTLE JOHN’S CONCLUDING WORDS (2 John 12-13).

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Letters are sometimes our only means of communication, but “face to face” fellowship is always better. The Apostle John perhaps has a special desire to help this lady because no mention is made of her husband. No child of God should be neglected in the ministry of the Word. Remember that the doctrine of Christ is really the key to the Scriptures.

Ladies, if you feel that I have been hard on you, I have only tried to say what I believe the Scriptures teach. You don't want to miss 3 John because then we will see what the Apostle John had to say about us men.