

“FOR THE TRUTH’S SAKE”

2 John 1-13

Intro: We are accustomed to speaking of the Old Testament and the New Testament as containing sixty-six books, while only a few are really books. When we get into the New Testament from Romans to Jude, we speak of them as epistles, or letters. Actually they are letters which were written to the church at Rome, and the church of Corinth, and so on. But actually most of them are treatises. By definition an epistle is a letter written usually written by one person to another person, or persons. But a treatise, again by definition is “a systematic exposition or argument in writing; a methodical discussion of the facts and principles involved and conclusions reached” (Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Fifth Edition, p. 1064).

By those definitions, 1 John is a treatise, but 2 and 3 John are letters. And I think that we all can easily see the difference. The Apostle John wrote all three of these. That is why they are called 1 John, 2 John and 3 John. But Second and Third John are different from First John, aren’t they? We have spent many weeks studying what the Apostle John wrote to assure believers in Christ that they are really saved, and saved forever. And he has taught that by showing that a true Christian is going to life a different life as far as sin is concerned, that a true Christian is going to love other Christians and will want to be with them, and that a true Christian is going to pay close attention to the commandments of Scripture and that those commandments will describe for him, and her, how they shall live. And we as Christians believe that he proved his point.

But when we come to 2 John and 3 John we see that these are letters, written by John to two individuals to instruct and warn them about two special problems. They are two of only five books in the Bible that have just one chapter (Obadiah in the OT; Philemon, the three epistles of John, and the epistle of Jude). And of the five, 2 and 3 John are the shortest of the five, 2 John being the shortest.

Now having said all of that, I probably am going to continue to speak of the NT from Romans to Jude as epistles.

Actually 2 John is an epistle, a letter from the Apostle John to an unnamed lady whom he identified simply as “an elect lady.”

John's greeting, or introduction, comes first in verses 1-3, followed by his message in verses 4-11, followed by his conclusion in verses 12 and 13. It is all very simple, but much to the point.

I. The Greeting (2 John 1-3).

This sounds very much like the Apostle Paul, doesn't it? This was the usual greeting among believers in those days, but the Apostle John must have been very familiar with the epistles of Paul by this time. It was probably over thirty years after the Apostle Paul had died.

Some believe that this lady was not a real person, but a church, and that her children were members of the church. I have a hard time believing that because it seems to have been a companion epistle with 3 John which was obviously written to a man, whom the Apostle John referred to by to by name, Gaius. And the general tenor of the letter is such that you would not be inclined to think anything but that the Apostle John was writing to a very godly mother of children.

He identified himself as an elder when he could have called himself an apostle probably because he did not overwhelm her with his authority. Possibly he had in mind what Paul wrote about elders, or bishops (same office). He may have been thinking of Paul's words about elders or bishops in Titus 1:9-11 as to their responsibilities:

9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:

11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

Then he called this lady, "elect lady." I am afraid that, excluding this congregation, many Christian ladies would not know what the "elect" means. It not only means that she knew that she was chosen for salvation, but it meant that she was living as you would expect a saved person to live. While she had believed in the Lord Jesus for her salvation, she knew that before there was any creation at all, God in His sovereign mercy and wisdom and power had chosen her to be saved. She gave God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit *all* of the glory for her salvation.

2 John (3)

And then the Apostle John used a word for the first of several times that he was going to use it, when he said to her, “whom I love in the truth.” You will see the word “truth” again at the end of verse 1. It appears for the third time in verse 2, a fourth time at the end of verse 3, and then for a fifth time in verse 4. Sometimes in the Greek text the word “the” is used with it; other times the word “truth” stands alone. This has led some expositors to say that when “the” is used with it, “the truth,” it refers to the Word of God, but when there is no “the” then it means something like *faithful* or *sincere*. But one problem is that it appears in English some times when it is not in the Greek. My own opinion is that the Word “truth” always refers to the Word of God either as a body of truth, such as we have in our Bibles, or it refers to the practice of the Word. So basically in the first mention of the Word in verse 1, the Greek text does not have “the” before it, but they believed that the Apostle John was talking about the Word. The Apostle John was saying that he loved this “elect lady,” not in a man and woman love, but he loved her as he loved all other believers in Christ. And he confirms that idea in the latter part of the verse where he added, “and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth.”

So this was a very remarkable lady. You have heard people say about some Christian brother or Christian sister, “Oh, everyone loves her (or him)!”

And then notice that verse 2 is a continuation of verse 1. The Apostle attributed the love that Christians have for each other as traceable to the effect that the Word of God has had in our lives. The truth is in us, and it is going to be in us forever. We need to praise God for that! We have been born again by the Word of God, and God continues to work in us throughout the rest of our lives. That is why it is so important for us to be reading the Word every day!

Now in verse 3 we have the common greeting which was often exchanged among the Lord’s people in those early days. Three blessings we need every day and all day every day are grace, mercy, and peace. And they are in endless supply because they come to us “from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father,” and I can truthfully add, *by the Holy Spirit!* And they come to us through the working of the truth of God in our hearts and because of God’s love which is continually being “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us” (see Romans 5:5). I am always thankful when people say to me,

“Have a good day!” But this greeting of the Apostle John is infinitely better, isn’t it?

But now let us go on to the message of the epistle.

II. The Message (2 John 4-11).

One very commendable thing about this elect lady was that not only was she walking in the truth, but her children were walking in the truth. Now the Apostle John was speaking of her family. Probably this lady was a widow. Her children were “found,” not that they had been lost, but that the Apostle John in his travels had gone where they were. They didn’t know that he was coming, but even though he took them unintentionally by surprise, he found that they were walking in the truth as we are told to do in the Word itself. These children, probably married with their own families, had gone on doing like their mother had taught them to do, to walk and keep walking in the truth. So, if you made a surprise visit on them, you would find them walking in the truth. God sees us all of the time, and sometimes the Lord’s people come upon us unexpectedly. How good it is if we find each other living for the Lord.

Now in verse 5 we come to the main message of this epistle. The Apostle John said that what he was about to say to this dear lady, was not new. It had been with them “from the beginning,” that is, it was among the first truths that they had been taught. Remember what we learned in 1 John 4:7, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” This is one of the major evidences that a person is saved. They love other believers. But how do we show our love for each other? The answer is in verse 6.

It is by keeping the commandments of Scripture, of the truth! But now here is the problem. And the Apostle John hits this hard. Look at verse 7. It is very, very important for us to love each other BECAUSE – see verse 7: “For many deceivers are entered into the world.” One thing that is always true of a deceiver is that he likes to make you think that he is someone who he is not! Do you remember that the Apostle John said in 1 John 2:19, “They went out from us . . .”? They can be smooth talkers, and much of what they say is good. But what is just as important for us to be looking for, is what they don’t say! The big question is, “What do they say about the Lord Jesus Christ?” And a part of that question is what do they mean by what they say, or don’t say?

2 John (5)

The Apostle John said in so many words that we are not to express our love to people who claim to be like we are until you find out what they believe about Christ. Do they say that “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh”?

Let me ask you a question here. And this is a question for any young married couple who are about to have a baby, to answer. We all need to think about it? Do we announce the birth of a baby by saying that he or she “has come in the flesh”? No, we don’t say that? Why should it be said about the baby Jesus? Because He became a human baby Who had previously existed eternally. A teacher who does not say that about the Lord Jesus Christ, is saying that He is just a human being; He is not the Son of God! And so instead of being a fellow believer that we are to accept and love, such a teacher is a liar and he is against Christ. He is antiChrist!

Now look carefully with me at verse 8. The Apostle John who apparently had done a lot of teaching for this elect lady and her family tells them that they are never to let anyone get them to give up what they have been taught by godly teachers, for the teaching of someone who is not saying the same thing, especially about our Lord. In verse 9 the Apostle John called it “the doctrine of Christ.”

Notice that word “transgresseth.” It is a word which suggests what a false teacher will tell you, that you may know some of the truth, but you don’t know all of it, and then they try to tell you things in addition to what you have learned from Scripture under godly teachers (which may be your own parents), but false teachers minimize Christ, and try to lead you on to better things.

The real test to put to every and any unknown teacher is, Do you believe what the Scriptures teach about Christ? Do you accept the Bible’s teaching about Christ? If they give you the equivalent of John 3:16 to teach where Jesus came from, who sent Him, and why He came, then listen to them. But if not, put on your running shoes and get away as fast as you can. It would be sinful to extend the love of the saints to such a person.

Remember this: the love of God and the Word of God, or the truth of God, are inseparable. We are to be kind to people, to show love to our enemies, but the love that we have from God is a love for each other in the family of God, and no one else qualifies for that. This is true in your family, and it is true in our church. One love rests upon the doctrine of

Christ. We all need to learning and learning and learning about our precious Lord. Anyone who does not come to us with the truth about Christ, is not to be accepted in our homes, nor are we to give them our blessing.

III. The Conclusion (2 John 12-13).

There is a real ministry in letter-writing. The NT emphasizes that over and over again. The one chapter books of the NT (Philemon, 2 and 3 John, and Jude) give strong testimony to the value of writing letters. But we must seek to minister in our letters. But, as the Apostle John indicated in the close of this letter, face to face ministry is even better.

Concerning the “elect sister” of the “elect lady” to whom this letter was written, we know nothing. It sounds a little like the “elect sister” may have been with the Lord. It is impossible to say. But the good part is that both of these godly ladies had children who were continuing to walk with the Lord.

The question needs to be raised, Why did the Spirit of God preserve a letter like this for a lady? Why not address it to a man? The best answer that I have come across is this: We know that in the home the husband is the head of the wife, and the wife is to be submissive to her husband. According to the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul taught that the home is to be a reflection of the relationship that Christ has to His Church. This letter was written to the wife to teach us that it is just as important for the wife to be taught in the doctrine of Christ as it is for the husband. And it goes from the husband and wife to the children. So that when the wife is taught the doctrine of Christ as well as her husband, they form a team which is certain to be blessed of God in seeing that their children know and love the doctrine of Christ too. Let us all love one another, but remember that the love we have from God for each other is only to be exercised within the limits of the truth of the Word of God.