

63. Jesus in 2 John and 3 John

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Let's face it. When was the last time you studied 2 and 3 John or Obadiah or Haggai? Somehow we think that these are less important Books than others because they are short and not well known. Contrary to our opinion, the Lord thinks that they are important enough to be included in the canonization of the Bible.

2 John

A. TIMELINE AND TARGET AUDIENCE

The Second Epistle of John was probably written at about the same time as 1 John or maybe shortly thereafter. We don't know whom this letter was written to, but it appears to be addressed to a particular Christian lady and her family.

Some commentators have concluded that 'the elect lady refers to a local church and that 'her children' are the believers fellowshiping in the church. I disagree, because that is an allegorical interpretation which is a very dangerous way to interpret the Bible. Once you start to interpret the Bible by using the allegorical methods, you can get really wacky interpretations that are far from God's original intention for the Scriptures.

B. THEME

By the time you finish this 13 verse Book, you will notice one word repeats itself over and over – TRUTH. Why is truth so important? As we all know, God's truth always goes against the grain of humans' carnal characters, so people, including us, try to dilute, marginalize, or even ignore it.

The apostle Paul echoes John for the importance of the truth in his famous epistle Ephesian 6 – the full armor of God. He didn't start his armor with the Sword of the Spirit or the Helmet of Salvation or the Breastplate of Righteousness, rather the Belt of Truth. Why is the truth so important to God and should be so important to us? Everything God has and has for us is based on the truth which is non-negotiable, and it is unchanging.

C. WE MUST KNOW THE TRUTH

2 John:1-3 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.

The apostle John uses the word 'truth' 4 times in these 3 verses. Truth means 'reality' as opposed to mere appearance. Jesus Christ Himself is the truth and God's Word is truth.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

The truth is not only an objective revelation from the Father God, but also a subjective experience in our personal lives. We can not only know the truth, but we can "love in the truth" and "live for the truth's sake."

What does it mean when John said, "the elect lady"? It means that she was chosen by God. Anyone who is born-again is elected and chosen by God.

Romans 8:29-30 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

How did this elect lady and her children come to know the truth and become children of God? Of course, through the grace and mercy of God. We are not saved by God's love, but by His grace which is love that paid a price. The true definition of God's love for mankind was displayed on the cross – the sinless God sacrificed Himself for the price of the sin of mankind that we might have eternal life in Him. God is not at war with lost sinners, though it is sinners who are at war with God.

Truth and love are two very powerful aspects of the Christian life. These are inseparable. Truth without love can make a person harsh and offensive to others. Love without truth can make a person naive and gullible to deception.

God's truth is not just something we keep in our heads. It is something that lives in our hearts. Many people today think that the truth can be changed from generation to generation, and culture to culture. That's what we called relative truth which is not the truth at all.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

D. BEWARE OF DECEIVERS AND ANTICHRISTS

2 John:7-11 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. 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.

Though we are to love everyone, this doesn't mean we trust everyone. There is a big difference between loving and trusting. We can truly love without being gullible. The Bible repeatedly warns us to beware of deceivers and know the difference between the truth and a lie. Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is to point out a lie or to warn others of a deceiver.

The Christian faith stands or falls on the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ. If He is only a man, then He cannot save us, because he had to deal with his own sinful nature no matter how gifted or unique He might be. If He is not God come in human flesh, then the Christian faith is lies.

Galatians 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

'Antichrist' means 'against Christ' or 'replacing Christ.' V9 makes it clear that if anyone denies Christ, that person is denying the Father. God the Father and Jesus come in a package deal. You cannot have one and not the other. But the way to have both is to abide in Christ's teachings. To 'abide' means to 'remain in' and implies both a knowledge of and a practice of the teachings of Christ.

About 10 some years ago, I mentioned, in one of my sermons, that when Jehovah's Witnesses came to our home, a couple of times I invited them in to show the true definition of Greek from my Bible computer software when they started to argue with me with their pre-fabricated Greek knowledge which was completely wrong. After the sermon, one of our congregation pointed out to me that, according to v10, I should have not invited them. I told him that the context of this verse is about allowing the false evangelists or teachers in their Jewish house churches. I believe that I am correct, but at the same time the man's point is also correct, in a way.

Please allow me to explain: I can invite either Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons to my home to show them the truth without any problem. I believe that I am prepared and equipped to go against their false doctrines. But I would never invite them to our church to teach their heresies from this pulpit.

Does it mean we can invite unbelieving neighbors to our homes for dinner to evangelize? Yes, friendship evangelism around the table is a wonderful way to win people to Christ. Christians need to be neighborly and hospitable.

E. APPLICATION

1) **The truth is not only an objective revelation from the Father God, but also a subjective experience in our personal lives.**

2) **Proclaim that Jesus is your God to anyone you have contact with.**

3 John

I find an interesting contrast between these 2 short letters – 2 and 3 John, by the apostle John, as he presented us the balance of truth.

2 John was written to a godly woman about her family, while 3 John was written to a godly man about his church. John warned "the elect lady" about false teachers from the outside in 2 John, but he warned Gaius about dictatorial leaders inside the fellowship in 3 John. The false teachers in 2 John would appeal to love so that they might deny the truth, while Diotrephes would appeal to truth as, in a most unloving way, he would attack the brethren.

A. TIMELINE AND TARGET AUDIENCE

The Book of 3 John was written in late 90s A.D. Some biblical scholars believe that 3 John was written after John wrote Revelation. This letter is the shortest NT epistle in the original Greek and it gives us a glimpse into an early assembly, its people and its problem. We all will notice that we still have similar people and problems as they did in the first century.

This letter was addressed to Gaius, one of the leaders of the assembly. But John also mentioned 2 other men in this letter – Diotrephes and Demetrius. Wherever there are people, there are problems because of our sinful nature – and the potential for solving problems through the Word of God. Each of us must honestly face the question, "Am I a part of the problem or a part of the solution?"

B. THEME

In 2 John, there was one word repeated 5 times in 13 verses – TRUTH. But in 3 John, the apostle John used it 6 times in 14 verses.

C. THE BELOVED GAIUS

3 John:1-8 The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: 2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. 3 For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. 5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, 6 who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, 7 because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. 8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

There is no question that the apostle John dearly loved this man Gaius. By reading v4, we get the feeling that Gaius must have been one of John's converts. If you had a privilege of leading someone to Christ, you feel extra close to those whom we get to be a part of their spiritual birth.

I must take some time to talk about v2. This kind of a greeting was very common in that day, so we must not build too much of our theology on it. It would be like, "I hope that this letter finds you well" in our greetings.

However, in the circle of the Word of Faith movement which is led by Kenneth Copeland, they use this verse 2 as a base for their Prosperity Gospel doctrine which is a heresy. They chose to interpret this common greeting to a Christian guarantee. Please allow me to explain to you why their doctrine is wrong.

Their Prosperity Gospel declares that you as Christians must have abundance of wealth and great health since you are children of God. If you don't have them, then you are lacking faith in God. Copeland says that this v2 is a universal verse that applies to every Christian. But did you notice that the apostle John was singling out Gaius in his prayer for him?

Anyone who takes the basic course of the Bible interpretation which is known as 'hermeneutics', knows that it emphasizes contexts. Within contexts, there are historical context, grammatical context and literary context. Within literary context, this verse applies within a local context for an individual named Gaius, not a universal context for everyone in general, like John 3:16.

True living only comes from living in the truth through the Word of truth. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to reveal the Son of God, and then to enable us to obey the Father's will and "walk in truth."

We have learned from John's second letter the importance of Christian hospitality in that day. John warned "the elect lady" against entertaining false teachers, but in this letter he commended Gaius for showing hospitality to the true ministers of the Word. Gaius was an encouragement, not only to the brethren in general, but especially to "strangers" who came to fellowship with the church and to minister.

D. DIOTREPHES THE DICTATOR

3 John:9-11 I wrote to the church, but Diotrophes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, does not receive us. 10 Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren,

and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. 11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

It seems like many churches have members who insist on “self-appointed boss” and having their own way. I must confess that sometimes it is the pastor who assumes dictatorial powers and forgets that the word ‘minister’ means “a servant.” But sometimes it is a board member, or an elder or a deacon, perhaps a longtime member of the church who thinks he or she has “seniority rights” and thinks that they own the church.

Diotrephes was motivated by pride. Instead of giving the preeminence to Jesus Christ, he claimed it for himself. His mantra was, “What is in it for me?” He was most unlike John the Baptist who said, “He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease.”

Church “dictators” are dangerous people, but fortunately, they are easy to recognize. They like to talk about themselves and what they have “done for the Lord.” They also have the habit of judging and condemning those who disagree with them. They are experts in putting labels on other Christians and classifying them into categories of their own intention. They base their fellowship on personalities, not the doctrines that are fundamental to the faith. The tragedy is that these “dictators” actually believe that they are serving God and glorifying Jesus Christ.

As I have said this before, the majority of church splits are done by these church dictators who completely base on personal preferences, not on the doctrines. We had a few shares of them in almost 18 years of our church history.

E. DEMETRIUS THE EXEMPLAR

3 John:12 Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself.

And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.

What a compliment for Demetrius from the apostle John! Demetrius was so faithful to the truth that even the truth was a witness on his behalf.

Demetrius was the very opposite of Diotrephes, a prime example of one who knows the truth and practices it. The placement of Demetrius’s name at the end of the letter suggests that he might have been the one who carried John’s letter to Gaius.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) True living only comes from living in the truth through the Word of truth.
- 2) The object of the servanthood in Christianity is OTHERS, not ourselves.