

John's Second and Third Epistles
Week Six
2 John and 3 John

Day One–2 John

¹ The elder, To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth – ²because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: ³ Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.

v. 1 – The first challenge is to know who “the elder” is who wrote this letter. It is beyond our scope to do extensive research, so let us assume that it is the same John who wrote 1 John. That John would not have to provide a lot of credentials or explanation, for he would have been known to the churches as one who had been with Jesus and had the authority of an eyewitness. **Who were the lady and her children?** Some believe it is a veiled reference to the church and her members, but that is not easy to prove. So let us assume that John was writing to a woman in the church, someone he knew and loved, who either had natural or spiritual children under her care or in her household. This woman was loved not only by John but also by those who were part of the church and who loved the truth.

This letter is very short – only 13 verses long (keeping in mind that John did not write with verses; they were added later). This should remind you that you don't have to do anything elaborate or lengthy to serve God's purposes. John wrote this lady a short letter that the Spirit inspired and preserved for our reading today.

v. 2 – John loved this woman in the truth because the truth lived both in him and her. This truth was also eternal truth. We know that this truth was and is not a doctrine, but a person – the person of Jesus. He Himself said

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

v. 3 – John indicated that the Father gives grace, mercy and peace. Those are three wonderful things to have in abundance! I need God's grace, mercy and peace every day. Yet I know to get mercy I must give it, to have grace I must accept it and to enjoy peace, I must obey the Father's will. Those three things don't just come; I have to cooperate with God's plan for them to be present in my life.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:5)

As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1).

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have **peace**. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Day Two-2 John

⁴It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. ⁵And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. ⁶And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. ⁷Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

v. 4 – John rejoiced in the good report from someone else’s life and ministry. **For whom are you rejoicing over the good things happening in their lives or ministries?**

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15).

v. 5 – This verse makes it seem as if John was writing to someone about their spiritual family, for it is not common to write to someone to urge them to love their natural family. John was giving spiritual direction here and it would seem it was given to someone about their spiritual family.

John’s ministry theme was love. **What is your theme? What are you best known for? What does your life and work represent to others?** My theme is purpose. I have tried to develop that theme so it can help others. **What is your trademark or brand in God’s work? Do you agree it’s important or even possible to have one?**

v. 6 – John pointed out that love is not a feeling and not dependent on circumstances or close relationships. Love is a command! And there is a set of non-negotiable guidelines for how to love according to God’s design. John heard Jesus talk about love many times and he took what he heard and applied it to his life and ministry. **What have you heard and how are you applying it?**

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them" (Luke 6:32).

The world knows the one thing believers should stand for and represent is love. **If nonbelievers know that, why don’t some believers? Are you known for your love? What proof is there that love is present in your life and work?**

v. 7 – John wrote his first epistle to address the problem of imposters who had gone out from the church, but who denied Jesus had come in the flesh. Those who left maintained that He was not a man in the way that others were. John knew this was dangerous because it would undermine the very message that Jesus preached. If Jesus said to love

as He loved and He was anything less or more than a man, then His teaching could be dismissed as idealistic or unachievable.

What's more, denying that Jesus came in the flesh is indirectly calling God a liar, for John bore witness to the necessity of God's sacrifice being one of Adam's descendants. John indicated that anyone who denied Jesus' humanity was part of an antichristian conspiracy that was devilish in its origins. It is important that you have an accurate picture of who Jesus is, what He did and what He does now. That is no place for uncertainty or fuzziness.

Day Three-2 John

⁸ Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. ⁹ Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.

v. 8 – John issued a warning that you must continue your work in the Lord or risk losing your reward! John would not write about losing your reward if it were not possible, and John was pointing out that some had just left the fellowship and lost what they had begun to build when they first came to faith. Yet they rejected faith and John urged this woman to whom he was writing not to do the same. We saw the other day that faith has its rewards, so John was urging this woman not to abandon her faith in the Lord Jesus.

v. 9 – John expanded on his warning, pointing out that those who run ahead of the teaching that the apostles handed down had lost God. Yet man rebellion's is so deep and pervasive that he is constantly looking for ways to circumvent or improve on God's words and ways. It is the same temptation that Eve faced in the Garden:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1).

Has God really said that Jesus is the only way to Him? Has God really said that the saints must be in fellowship with one another? Has God truly said that Jesus is the Son of God? Did Jesus really come in the flesh, or did it only appear to be so? Man asks all these questions in every generation as he tries to find a loophole in the required obedience to God. Are you looking for loopholes, or for ways to submit and obey? You must stand under the authority of God's word and not stand to the side judging God's word.

v. 10 – John warned her not to receive anyone who was not in line with the teaching that he authorized or endorsed. If that was true then, it is still true today. **And how do we know what John taught?** We only know what he taught through God's Word, which is why the study of God's word and the explanation of it through preaching and teaching

are so important. **Are you staying true to God’s word as it is presented or are you taking liberties with what it says?** The latter is a dangerous exercise with disastrous possibilities, for it can cause you to lose your relationship with the Lord!

Day Four-2 John

¹¹ Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. ¹² I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. ¹³ The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.

v. 11 – John said that anyone who welcomed the heretical teacher in question was guilty of aiding and abetting his false teaching, or as John described it, his “wicked work.” There was no tolerance in John’s mind for someone who was teaching something contrary to what he and the other apostles had taught. That false teacher would need a place to stay and someone to feed him while he was teaching, and John cautioned that it could not be a true believer.

Is it safe to say that anyone who would detract from the message of Jesus does wicked work? What if they are sincere but still teach false doctrine about Jesus? What if they are part of a strong historical group like Buddhism or Hinduism? Do they also do wicked work? According to John, they do! Sincerity is not a factor in theology. You can be sincere and be sincerely wrong! What’s more, there are some who say no one can know the truth with absolute certainty. That is a lie. John and the apostles gave us a truthful testimony of what they saw, heard and knew. What they taught was then confirmed by the Lord through signs and wonders. To deny what they passed on to us is a wicked deed!

v. 12 – Now we learn why John’s letter was so short. He preferred to talk to this woman face-to-face! I prefer face-to-face meetings as well. That is why I travel so much. I want to see things and people firsthand, for there is no substitute for the dynamic that Paul wrote about to the Romans:

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith (Romans 1:11-12).

Where do you need to go? With whom do you need to have a face-to-face meeting? What missions trip have you been putting off that you need to pursue? What gift do you have that others need at this time? Are you underestimating your ability to be a blessing to others? Is that why you are staying home or limiting your contact with other believers?

v. 13 – We don’t know who this chosen sister was any more than we know the identity of the woman John was writing. This letter seems to have been written simply to prevent the woman from assisting the false teacher or teaching when they came to her area. John

was concerned for the flock and wanted to protect the integrity of their teaching about Jesus.

Day Five – 3 John

¹The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. ²Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. ³It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. ⁴I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

3 John 1 – It is interesting that the Spirit preserved two personal letters from John written to two individuals – one to an unnamed sister and another to this man named Gaius. John loved them both “in the truth” which was an important thing for John. The first was love and the second was truth. John could not fellowship anyone who was not of the truth, for he had beheld the truth firsthand in Jesus and knew the importance of that for worshipping God.

John referred to Gaius as his dear friend. **Do you have any dear friends? When is the last time you were in touch with them? Told them you loved them?**

v. 2 – John wished his friend well and that all was prospering in his life – body as well as soul. This is a basic introduction that you would find in any letter. Common courtesies are not to be put aside just because we are believers. Paul wanted the very best for Gaius and verbalized it. **Whom can you encourage and wish well today? Don’t put it off – do it! What’s more, John just didn’t wish his friend well; he *prayed* for that to happen. Do you have a regular prayer regimen? For whom do you pray? What are you praying to happen in their lives?**

v. 3 – The apostles had many imperfections, but God worked in their lives and they became living examples of what they taught. John wished his friend the best in everything and then John rejoiced when he received a good report about Gaius’ faithfulness to the truth. John was not just happy that his friend was doing well, he was happy that his friend was doing well in the Lord. **How joined are you to others (not just your family) for whom you can share in their joy or sorrow?** Paul had the same dynamic present in his life as he described his work as an apostle:

Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (2 Corinthians 11:28-29).

Lord, help me to be so connected to my brothers and sisters that I can rejoice with them when they do well and not feel threatened or envious. I want to rejoice with those who are happy and mourn with those who are sad.

v. 4 – John had no greater joy than to hear that his spiritual children were walking in the truth. What selflessness this exhibits! John was able to put aside selfishness to be happy for someone else. This reminds me of what Paul wrote about Timothy, which was obviously just as true of John:

I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel (Philippians 2:20-22).

What's more, consider how far John had come when you consider that he at one time wanted to call down fire on those who opposed Jesus! (see Luke 9:54).

Can you allow God to do a work in you that will enable you to love and serve others with the same kind of selflessness?

Day Six-3 John

⁵ Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. ⁶ They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. ⁷ It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. ⁸ We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth. ⁹ I wrote to the church, but Diotrefes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. ¹⁰ So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

vs. 5&6 – Gaius had been contributing to the Lord's work by providing hospitality for God's traveling teachers and apostles. John commended Gaius for his support and urged him to send the messenger workers on in a way that was "worthy of God." **How would you send God off if He was staying with you?** I would think in fine fashion with all His needs met and some provisions for His trip. So you should do the same for those who represent God! What's more, the report of Gaius' hospitality and support of the Lord's work had spread to other churches. Paul reported the same phenomenon and encouraged the saints to continue in good works because of how it stimulated others to their own good works. I guess good behavior is contagious through the work and influence of the Holy Spirit!

v. 7 – Whoever went out to preach, teach and strengthen the churches, they did it with no help from the world, and they did it for God. Notice John's wording: They did it for the sake of the Name. God will test your motives when you do things that are related to His work. **Are you doing them for your own purposes or for the sake of His name and Word?** And what's more, He will be the One to provide for you, whether through the saints, the pagans or through some unexpected source. And He may never use the same source twice, just so your trust is always in Him.

v. 8 – What a novel idea: to work together for the truth! That should be the goal in all our churches, missions committees, youth departments, and denominations. We should not only seek to debate the truth, study the truth, and learn the truth, but we should also **work** for the truth! What’s more, we should work together. **Where and how are you working with others for the truth of the gospel of Jesus? What more can you do?**

v. 9 – It is nothing short of amazing that a man named Diotrephes would have nothing to do with the apostle John who wrote this epistle. John was with Jesus and had insight into the Word and work of God like few others, yet this man felt he knew better and shunned John! Yet there were those who had no use for the apostle Paul either. My point here is that you may or may not be celebrated by those with whom you work, but stay true to who God made you to be and what He sent you to do. It is only after your work is done that people will celebrate your leadership. While you lead, they will usually criticize and complain!

v. 10 – This man shunned John, gossiped about him and refused to support and help those who were teaching the true faith. He had his own agenda and thought he had insight that was contrary and superior to John’s! If John had opponents, then be sure that you will have some as well if you seek to serve the Lord and stay true to His teaching and Word.

John promised that, if he came to that area, he would expose that pastor for who he was – someone who wanted to be first among all. He was eager to be the leader and he was putting people out of the church who were trying to do the right thing to help those who were assisting God’s workers. John, Paul, Peter and all of the men of God had to contend with false teachers and impostors as they worked in God’s vineyard. You will have to do the same; just make sure you aren’t part of the problem! Read what Paul told the Ephesian elders when he bid them farewell and you will understand the spiritual warfare that is part of all church work:

"Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears" (Acts 20:25-31).

Day Seven-3 John

¹¹ Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. ¹² Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true. ¹³ I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so

with pen and ink. ¹⁴I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.

v. 11 – John gave some basic instruction here, telling Gaius to imitate what is good and not what is evil. John also pointed out that anyone who imitates evil has not seen God! That is not hard to understand, which is just how it should be. You don't have to study the original languages or go to seminary to comprehend what John meant there. **Yet how can anyone know what is good and evil?** They would have to know God's word to know what God approves and what is sin. And that Word came from Jesus' disciples who were with Him or who lived in the same century (like Paul).

v. 12 – This is a short letter, but John mentioned three men by name – two of whom he approved and one with whom he had a problem. This is a reminder that the church is about people and not about programs and buildings. Demetrius mentioned in this verse was a man commended by John, by the other saints and by the truth itself!

John spoke well of this man and he affirmed that his (John's) testimony was true! That means that John's letter was also true, since the Spirit was the One who affirmed the letter's content. What a great testimony Demetrius had! Others spoke well of him for the right reasons, for he was God's servant who upheld the truth. That is the kind of testimony I want as well.

vs. 13&14 – John had much to write, but he preferred to deliver what he had to write in person, so he made the letter short. Not everything that has to do with God needs to be complicated or long-winded. John was short and to the point, promised to come if he could and deal with the problems, and deliver the rest of what was on his heart. John hoped to see them soon so they could fellowship together and he could share what else he had to say and teach.

So John closed like any typical letter would close. With greetings to others and sending greetings from those who were with him, wherever he was at that point in his ministry. There were no spiritual or fancy closings, just a simple good bye and "hope to see you soon" closing.

I am impressed by how short these two letters are, yet they were inspired and used by the Spirit of God. **How long would it take you today to write a short note to someone of whom you have been thinking recently?** Don't put it off; do it today.