

2 & 3 John • Chapter Study

INTRO

Both 2 & 3 John are brief letters sent by the Apostle John *to individuals*.

Their style & content match 1 John.

But while 1 John was written to ALL believers & the church in general, these 2 ltrs are addressed to specific people.

2 John

¹ The Elder,

Though the Church has accepted the Ap John as the author of this ltr since all the way back in the 2nd C, he never gives his name; which was *typical* for John.

He always referred to himself in an *oblique* fashion.

In his Gospel, he calls himself “the disciple Jesus loved.”

Here, he’s just, “*the elder*.”

In Greek, *presbuteros* = lit. “*older*.”

The terms referred to those *older men* of a community who served as leaders; the official authorities.

From the earliest days of the Church, it was recognized it needed *leadership* & some way to be organized.

The earliest records we have of the Church makes clear the earliest Christian communities followed the example of the Jewish *synagogues*; which makes sense since those *first Christians were Jews*.

The synagogue was lead by a small group of spiritually-mature men, who selected 1 of them to be their leader; a first among equals.

Since it usually takes a few years to develop spiritual maturity, these leaders were typically older men – *elders* who provided leadership for the community.

In the Church, these elders were the shepherds who provided leadership both by *example* & in *servicing* the flock.

The *lead* elder was the *pastor*.

As the Church grew and moved into the Gentile world, many local congregations were grew so rapidly, they didn’t have a pool of *older* men to draw leaders from.

So younger men were looked to , to provide that leadership.

They may not have many years in age, but they demonstrated a spiritual-maturity & gifting that was the work of God’s grace.

They possessed wisdom & skill beyond their years.

So, though not physically old, they were spiritually mature and became elders & pastors.

Timothy & Titus are examples of this.

John refers to himself here as “THE Elder,” not “an elder.”

As humble as John was, (& he was!), he reminds his reader that his role as an Apostle is *unique*.

¹ To the elect lady & her children, whom I love in truth, & not only I, but also all those who have known the truth,

² because of the truth which abides in us & will be with us forever:

Commentators are divided into 2 camps on how to understand *who* John addresses here.

1) 1 grp sees this as *a family*, comprised of a woman & her children w/whom John was well acquainted.

2) The other sees this as a reference to *a local church*.

The lady is a congregation while her children are those who’ve come to Faith thru her faithfulness to the Gospel.

Commentators are split over these 2 views because there equal evidence for each.

The main clue is the *pronouns* John uses.

Sometimes they’re *plural*, other times *singular*.

It’s in *what* John says that moves us to conclude he’s addressing a local congregation he’s familiar with.

Look at what he says here . . .

Not only does *he* love this family, *all those* who know the truth love her.

That seems to fit a church better than an individual family.

In v2 John gives the unique tie that secures the bond of love among the people of God: *Truth*.

What makes our affection for 1 another *possible* is our common faith in an *objective* truth – The Person & Work of Jesus Christ.

There are many groups within **Christendom** calling for Unity.

They're worried that **either** Secular Humanism or radicalized forms of other religions will **wipe out** the Christian faith.

They forget Jesus said He would establish His Church & the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Sadly, while well-meaning, this push for unity would **roll right over** the Truths upon which **Biblical** Christianity is set.

The unity Jesus had in mind & prayed for in John 17 isn't found by 20 people of different ages, wearing different religious outfits & styles of hats, sitting at a round table all smiling at each other & sharing a common meal.

The Unity Jesus wants from His people is agreement in The Truth about Him & His Work.

It's not unity that unites; it's **Truth** that unites us.

The Truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God & God the Son.

That He died for our sins & rose again from the dead for our justification & new life.

That we are saved by grace thru faith in Christ, not by works.

Holding fast to *this truth* is what makes for the only kind of unity God considers unity.

Anything else is sham.

Where **that kind** of unity exists, there **is** love for & commitment to 1 another.

Truth must never be sacrificed on the altar of unity.

Truth is an important issue to John. It's one of his **favorite** words.

He uses it **58 times** in his writings.

This emphasis on Truth is 1 we need to **reaffirm** because we live in what's called the Post-Modern age that's largely **given up** on the idea of True-Truth.

Modernity, what we would call the **Modern Era**, began in the 19th C & **ended** in the 60's.

It was then that **Einstein's Theory of Relativity** was applied to **sociology**.

Just as **Darwin's Theory of Evolution** had been transferred from biology to sociology, economics, politics & religion a century before.

The Theory of Relativity deals w/**physics**; but it was such a powerful idea, people began to apply it to **sociology & ethics**.

Suddenly, Truth was up for grabs. It became **relative & situational**.

Now, Truth is **whatever works** for an individual or the greater good of larger society.

Pragmatism. Utilitarianism.

It's this kind of "truth" that allowed Hitler & Stalin to rise to power & murder millions.

Since the 60's, we've moved into what's called the **Postmodern Age**.

With Modernity, Truth was **relative**.

But now, even the **idea** of Truth itself is up for grabs.

Let me illustrate it this way:

While a Modern person would justify his/her actions on the basis of situational ethics, explaining why what they did out of some internal sense of right & wrong

The Postmodern feels no **need** to **justify** him/herself.

He does what he does & answers to no 1; because there is no 1 w/the moral authority to answer to.

Because there's no Truth – just choices that have positive or negative consequences; & **even that** is decided by the person those consequences fall on.

All of this is a massive strategy by satan to gut the Gospel of its power.

If there's no truth, there's no right & wrong.

If there's no right & wrong, there's no sin.

And if there's no sin, there's nothing to be saved from and Jesus died for nothing.

But don't be discouraged.

Because the fact is; as we faithfully share the Gospel, the HS **convicts** people of their sin.

What Paul said is still true –

Rom 1:16 • For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first & also for the Greek.

Look at the last part of v2 -

. . . because of the truth which abides in us & will be with us forever:

Truth does not change!

Humanity's ways of thinking change, but that doesn't alter reality.

Truth is real & always will be.

³ Grace, mercy, & peace will be w/you from God the Father & from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth & love.

There they are yet again = Truth & Love. They **go together** & ought not be separated.

Did you note how John once again slips in the point that Jesus is God?

The grammar of the Grk in v3 are utterly clear; God the Father & the Lord Jesus Christ" are **equals**.

Grace, Mercy, & Peace originate in & flow from BOTH.

The titles "God" & "Lord" refer to the **same object**.

Listen: It's a non-negotiable fact of Scripture: The Bible calls Jesus, God.

⁴ I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.

John had met believers from this church & found them to be people of integrity & faithfulness.

For this, he rejoiced!

They reflected well on the fellowship they'd come from.

That's true of **every** local church & its members.

We draw conclusions about a church on the basis of the people we meet who go there.

So – what do your friends & the people you work with think of CCO?

What do your **relatives** think of the place you go to church?

But it doesn't stop there.

The impression we give people extends all the way to THE Church; the Body of Christ & ultimately even to Jesus.

⁵ And now I plead w/you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love 1 another. ⁶ This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

This sounds just like what we found in 1 John.

Genuine love is revealed by keeping God's commandments.

The chief commandment is to do what? Love 1 another.

Loving 1 another is the **primary moral principle** of the Christian life.

In John 13:34 Jesus said –

A new commandment I give 2U, that U love 1 another; as I have loved U, that U also love 1 another.

John 15:12 • This is My commandment, that you love 1 another as I have loved you.

John 15:17 • These things I command you, that you love 1 another.

⁷For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess JC *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver & an antichrist. ⁸ Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.

"For" at the beginning of v7 means there's a link back to vs5-6.

John exhorts them to walk in love – **Because** – many deceivers have gone out into the world.

A loving lifestyle is a **prime deterrent** to the danger of deception.

Given John's love of the word "truth" we might expect him to say they need to walk in **truth** rather than **love** to avoid deception.

But that's John's whole point in vs2-6: If we're walking in Truth, we're also walking in Love.

The **genuineness** of Truth is **manifested** in Love.

As we saw in our study in 1 John, the false teachings he referred to was an early form of *Gnosticism* called *Docetism*.

Docetists believed Jesus & Christ were 2 separate beings.

Jesus was merely a good man

Christ was a spirit of enlightenment that descended on Jesus at His baptism & departed from Him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

John saw Docetism as a significant danger.

He says it's the foundation on which the antichrist will erect his end-times abomination.

So John warns them, saying, "Take heed to yourselves; make sure you're not seduced by this deception, and so end up losing the reward you've been depositing up in heaven!"

⁹ Whoever transgresses & does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father & the Son.

'Transgress' means 'to cross the line; to go beyond the boundary.'

If someone **purposely** walks away from the truth, if they, with intention, turn their back on Christ & forsake Him, crossing the line of apostasy regarding the Person & Work of Christ, they've abandoned / forfeited their relationship w/God.

We need to be careful here and understand vs7-9 as being ***1 piece that goes together***.

John's readers must ensure they don't get caught up in the deception of false teachers.

If they do, & agree w/their heresy about Who Jesus is and What He's done, they've abandoned salvation.

If they keep their faith in Christ, they're not only secure in Christ, there in the Father too.

¹⁰ If anyone comes to you & 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.

According to the qualifications of elders in 1 Tim 3 & Titus 1, hospitality is a mark of spiritual maturity.

But John cautions his readers to use discretion.

While hospitality is a virtue, it ought to be employed in advancing the Gospel, not error.

Our generosity must **never** promote evil.

In the 1st C, there were **many** itinerant teachers who traveled from place to place.

They depended on hospitality for room & board.

John cautions Christians to not assist heretics by opening their homes & facilitating the spread of lies.

He's **not** condoning rudeness to false teachers. He says, "Don't assist them."

¹² Having many things to write to you, I did not wish *to do so* w/paper & ink; but I hope to come to you & speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

He hoped to visit them, but was unsure when that would be, so thought it best to write.

There was much more he wanted to say to them that this letter contains, but trusted this was sufficient & would fill in the rest when he did see them.

¹³ The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

If the elect woman of v1 **is** a local congregation, this sister would be other local churches.

John 3

¹ The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:

This begins as 2 John did.

But instead of a local congregation, John now writes to ***1 man*** – Gaius.

There are several men in the NT named Gaius. We don't know who this was.

He was a personal acquaintance of John's & there was a special bond btwn them.

² Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things & be in health, just as your soul prospers. ³ For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came & 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.

Apparently, Gaius was 1 of John's converts.

Word reached John he was doing well & his testimony brought glory to God.

Nothing stoked John more.

So he expresses his desire that just as Gaius has prospered in ***spiritual*** things, he'd do so in the ***material*** realm.

When I pray, when the staff & elders pray for you, we pray the ***same*** prayer.

We pray you'd know the fullness of God's blessings, in body, soul & spirit.

But we know the blessings God desires for you are ***eternal*** blessings; things that last far longer than a few days, weeks or yrs.

It's a far greater blessing to have the virtues of love & holiness cultivated in us than to live in an earthly mansion for 50 yrs.

It's a far great blessing to step out in faith & see God's miraculous provision for going to Thailand where

you get to assist in rescuing children from human trafficking than live on a safe & quiet street in VC. So while we pray for you to be blessed in **every** area, we realize God uses **whatever** means are necessary to bestow the highest & eternal blessings.

And sometimes that means the prospering of the soul at the expense of the flesh.

If that's the case, then our prayer is that you'd **quickly** learn whatever God seeks to teach.

⁵ Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren & 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.

It was the nature of church life at this time that there were a lot of itinerant teachers who made the rounds of the local churches, leading people to the Faith, teaching the Word, and generally encouraging the Body of Christ with their spiritual gifts.

These traveling ministers depended on the generosity of believers.

John commends Gaius' assistance of those who were spreading the Gospel & promoting the Kingdom of God.

While in In 2 John, he'd said false teachers were to be **denied** assistance, here he affirms it **ought** to be given to true servants of Christ.

Indeed - those who provide for them become fellow-workers in their mission.

⁹ I wrote to the church, but Diotrophes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. John mentions a guy who's 180 degrees different from Gaius & the hospitality commended in the previous verses.

Diotrophes was a power-hungry, arrogant pastor of a local church who refused to acknowledge John's or the other Apostles' authority.

He set himself up as someone special who answered to no 1.

It seems John sent a ltr to his church, but Diotrophes refused to pass it on to the congregation!

¹⁰ Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us w/malicious words. & not content w/that, he himself does not receive the brethren, & forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.

This guy sounds like he's well on the way to starting a cult!

Almost every cult is led by someone who claims to be the sole authority who answers to no 1, but all must answer **to**.

He shuts his followers off from listening to any1 else for fear they'll find something w/which to question him.

That's what Diotrophes did w/his flock.

He shut them off from outside sources & shunned any attempt to hold him accountable.

If any1 was found listening to unapproved sources, Diotrophes kicked them out.

Sad to say there are Diotrophes-pastors today.

Power-hungry tyrants whose attitude is, "My way or the highway."

They refuse to check their ideas against orthodoxy, against what godly scholars have gleaned from the Word of God.

They come up w/novel interpretations of Scripture that really, are just rationalizations for something they **want** to be true because it advances their personal agenda.

If anyone questions them, their labeled insubordinate & black-listed.

John says that if he had a chance to visit Diotrophes' church, he'd confront him.

Wouldn't; you love to be in **that** service?

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.

We ought to take vs10 & 11 as going together.

It's obvious from John's reference to Diotrophes that Gaius **knew** him, & may have looked **up** to him as a senior leader.

John didn't want Gaius to be stained by Diotrophes terrible example.

This is pure conjecture on my part, but the way John puts all this, I wonder if Diotrophes & Gaius were

pastors of nearby communities.

Diotrephes had the larger church & a more notable ministry.

He was the “bigger” name if you will & John was concerned Gaius might be tempted to envy.

This could move him to emulate what Diotrephes was doing.

So John says – “Gaius, don’t follow in Diotrephes’ footsteps. What he’s doing is evil & I ‘ll rebuke him for it when I get there. In the meantime, don’t follow his example. **Keep doing good!**”

Chuck Smith often remarked that following the explosive growth of CCCM in the early yrs, they regularly had tours of pastors & church leaders from all over the world that came by to figure out the secret of CC’s success.

Books were written & reports made as hundreds of churches tried to duplicate what CCCM was doing.

Success is attractive.

When a leader who’s insecure sees success, there’s a powerful temptation to **copy** that success.

It seems that Gaius, good man that he was, was in danger of falling into that trap so John cautioned him.

Instead of imitating Diotrephes – John points Gaius in a better direction -

¹² Demetrius has a *good* testimony from all, & from the truth itself. & we also bear witness, & you know that our testimony is true.

If Gaius was looking for an example to follow, he’d be better served by looking at **Demetrius**, a model of what it means to have a good testimony of serving Christ.

This reminds us of the importance of **godly examples** as we follow Christ.

We mustn’t elevate or exalt people, but that doesn’t mean we can’t look to others for an **example of how** to live the Christian life.

In 1 Cor. 4:16 the Apostle Paul said

Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 he said -

Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.

In Hebrews 6:12 were told to -

. . . imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Right here in v11 John says to **imitate** what’s good.

The elders of a local church are supposed to serve as **examples** of what it means to be a mature Christian.

Who do **you** look to as an example of what it means to faithfully follow Christ?

John closes this ltr as he had the previous -

¹³ I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; ¹⁴ but I hope to see you shortly, & we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

Most NT ltrs end with greetings to specific individuals.

John doesn’t in all 3 of his.

Many commentators believe the reason he left names out was because persecution was heating up.

If this ltr fell into the wrong hands, it could incriminate those named in it.

Gaius & Demetrius are named only because they were **already** well-known leaders of the Christian community.

Next up – Micah & Nahum > Probably abt 2 wks.

Then Jude.

Then we’ll finish off the OT w/Habakkuk – Malachi.

And conclude with Revelation.