

## 2 & 3 John – Chapter Study

### INTRODUCTION

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

Their style and content match that used in 1 John and that the Apostle was the author has been undisputed since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century.

Both letters *repeat* what we find in 1 John but this time stresses the importance of these things to *individuals*.

### 2 JOHN

#### <sup>1</sup>The Elder,

Though the authorship of the Apostle John is well-established for this little letter, he never gives his name – which was typical for John.

He always referred to himself in an oblique fashion.

In the gospels he calls himself the disciple Jesus loved.

He calls himself the younger one.

Here, he is just, “*the elder*.”

The word for *elder* – *presbuteros* – literally meant “older” and was used for *all* the *older men* of the community.

Our modern term is “seniors.”

While there was an official office of church leadership called the “elders,” these were drawn from men who were more mature and experienced in the things of the faith – the older men – not necessarily in years, but in proven spiritual depth.

When the author refers to himself as “THE Elder” he is not claiming an office as the leader of a local church.

It’s more than that – he is THE Elder – meaning his role as a leader is unique.

There’s good evidence in some of the writings of the early church that this title of “The Elder” was used of the Apostles.

**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, <sup>2</sup>because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:**

Commentators are divided into two equal camps on how to understand precisely who John is addressing here.

1) One view sees this as a woman and her children with whom John was well acquainted.

2) The other sees this as a reference to a local church; the lady is the whole congregation while her children are the individuals who have been brought to faith through her faithful testimony.

The reasons why commentators are pretty evenly split over these two views is because there seems to be equal evidence for each.

The main clue is the use of pronouns when speaking of the elect lady and her children.

At times the pronouns are plural, at other times they are singular.

Overall – the content of what we find here seems to point to the fact that John is addressing this to a local congregation that he was well-familiar with.

Look at what he says right here –

Not only does he love this elect lady and her children, but he says all those who have known the truth love her.

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

In v. 2 John gives the unique tie that secures the bond of love among the people of God – Truth!

What makes our love and affection for one another *possible* is our common faith – a faith that finds its object in one objective truth – the person and work of Jesus Christ.

There's a tremendous cry for *Unity* in the Church today.

In fact, leaders of various denominations, churches and groups are saying that we need to unite or secular humanism will wipe out the Christian faith.

This is a blatant denial of something Jesus said, that He would establish His Church and the very gates of hell would not prevail against it.

But still, the cry for unity is strong and so we see talks between major denominations and branches of the Christian Church which are aimed at reconciliation.

Leaders of the Roman Catholic Church are meeting with leaders of several Protestant groups trying to hammer out a compromise.

Even a few of the major cults are seeking to merge into larger Christendom.

In order to attain this kind of unity, what's being compromised and negotiated are the classic beliefs of historic, Biblical Christianity.

But this isn't at all the kind of unity Jesus had in mind and prayed for in John 17.

The strength of Biblical unity is that it is UNITED in ONE THING – its commitment to the Truth.

It is this that unites us – we believe in One God and His Son Jesus Christ.

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

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

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

What's wonderful is that where *this kind* of unity truly exists, then there *is* love and commitment to one another.

Truth must never be sacrificed on the altar of unity.

Rather – our Unity is in holding fast to the Truth!

Truth is an important issue to John – in fact, it's one of his *favorite* words.

He uses the word *truth* or *true* 58 times in his writings – including these well known verses –

**John 1:14 • And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**

**John 1:17 • For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**

**John 4:23 • But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.**

**John 8:32 • And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”**

**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 15:26 • “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.**

**John 16:13 • However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.**

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

**1 John 3:18 • My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.**

This emphasis on *Truth* is one that modern Christians need to reaffirm.

I say that because the whole idea of Objective, Absolute Truth, which is the ground and strength of the Christian faith, is under attack today.

Actually, that's not quite right – the battle is *almost over* and the idea that there's a fixed absolute

truth has nearly lost.

*Modernity* – what we would call the *Modern Age* and how it thinks, began in about the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and ended in the mid-60's.

The defining philosophical point of modernity was the forsaking of the classical idea of a fixed, objective, absolute truth.

Modernity embraced the idea that truth is *relative* and *situational*.

Truth is whatever works for an individual or for the greater good of society.

It was this brand of truth that allowed Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin to rise to power and put to death multiply millions of the people.

It's this view of truth that

It's the basis for *situational ethics* and for the clichés that seem to govern today's morality – “I got no problem with that.” & “It works for me!”

But since the mid-60's, we've moved into a new phase of modernity – called *post-modernity*; we now live in the post-modern age.

In modernity – truth was at least *relative*; in the post- modern age – the *whole idea* of truth is totally up for grabs!

In other words, while the modern man might at least attempt to justify himself on the basis of situational ethics and showing how his choices followed some internal sense of what was best for himself and others – the post modern man feels no need whatsoever to justify himself.

He does what he does and answers to no one – because there is no one with the moral authority to answer to.

Why? Because there is no truth – just choices that have positive or negative consequences.

It was totally post-modern thinking that handled the way the previous president was dealt with by the popular media when he was caught in his scandal with Monica Lewinski.

Those who maintained a *classical view* of objective truth, and even a *modern view* of relative & pragmatic truth, were stunned by the way the president's behavior was so summarily dismissed as being *irrelevant* to his role as president.

Note something John says here in v. 2 -

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

Truth, my friends, is real and does not change!

The fashions of humanity's ways of thinking may change, but that doesn't alter reality.

What is true is true and will always and forever be true.

While it seems at times as we seek to share our faith that we're speaking a different language from the world – the power of the gospel will win out over the errors of this age.

There is power in the truth – and that power will become increasingly evident as the world gives up the idea of the *existence* of truth.

**<sup>3</sup>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.**

Once again John links truth and love. They go together and ought not be separated.

Once more we see another subtle indication of how the Bible *affirms* the deity of Jesus.

In the Greek language – the construction of v. 3 makes it clear that John intends us to see “God the Father” and “the Lord Jesus Christ” as *equals*.

He says that Grace, Mercy, and Peace come from BOTH of them, equally!

The title “God” and “Lord” refer to the same object.

John makes this crystal clear when he adds that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father.

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

John had met some of the believers from this church and found them to be people of integrity and faithfulness. For this, he rejoiced!

He saw these individuals as representations of what was going on in the fellowship they had come from.

They reflected the nature and character of the church.

That's true of every local church and it's members.

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

So – what do the people at your work think of CC?

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

But it doesn't stop there – the impression we give people is even more far-reaching; it extends all the way to the Larger Church – the Body of Christ, and ultimately even to our Lord and Savior.

**<sup>5</sup>And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. <sup>6</sup>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.**

What he writes here is reminiscent of what we find in 1 John – that genuine love is revealed in that we keep God's commandments – and God's chief commandment is to do what?

Love one another!

Loving one another is the primary moral principle of the Christian life.

In John 13:34 Jesus said –

**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.**

[John 15:12 • This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:17 • These things I command you, that you love one another.]

**<sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.**

V. 7 begins with the word “For” showing there's a link in thought between vs. 5 & 6.

John exhorts them to walk in love – *for, because* – many deceivers have gone out into the world. He sees the reality and power of a loving lifestyle as 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* as the deterrent to deception.

But that's John's whole point in vs. 2-6: If we're walking in Truth, then we're also walking in Love.

The genuineness of truth is manifested in love.

It's clear that the false teaching John's dealing with here is an *early form* of *Gnosticism* commonly referred to as *Docetism*, which we looked at in our study in 1 John.

The Docetists believed Jesus and Christ were two separate things:

Jesus was merely a good moral man

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

John sees in this false teaching a real danger – in fact, he sees it as the intellectual foundation upon which the spirit of antichrist will erect his abominations.

So John warns them and says – take heed to yourselves; make sure you're not seduced by this deception, and so end up losing the reward you've been treasuring up in heaven by faith!

**<sup>9</sup>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.**

We need to be cautious here and make sure we handle this carefully.

Note closely what John says –

The word ‘transgress’ means ‘to cross the line – to go beyond the boundary.’

John is saying that if someone walks away from the truth, if they turn their back on Christ and forsake Him, crossing the line of apostasy regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ, then they’ve lost their relationship with God as Father and child.

We need to see vs. 7-9 as all going together.

John is saying that his readers need to take heed to themselves that they don’t get caught up in the deception of the false teachers – and if they do, and come to the place of agreeing with their heresy about the person and work of Jesus Christ, then they’ve forfeited their salvation.

But if they *do* take heed to themselves and continue to abide in the truth of who and what Jesus did, then they not only have Christ, they have the Father also.

**<sup>10</sup>If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; <sup>11</sup>for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.**

Christian charity and hospitality are signs of spiritual maturity.

But John cautions his readers to use discretion.

While charity and hospitality are virtues, they must always and only be used to support and further the *higher* work of the Gospel.

Our generosity must *never* be used to promote evil – especially evil that lies in direct contradiction to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John is not so much looking at individuals who are *following* a false teacher, as he is those who are promoting and spreading error.

In the ancient world – there were many itinerant teachers and philosophers who traveled from place to place.

They depended on the hospitality of others for room and board.

John is simply cautioning Christians to not assist heretics by opening their homes to them and so facilitating the spreading of lies about Jesus.

He’s not saying that we ought not be civil to false teachers.

He’s saying, “Don’t assist them in any way.”

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

John wanted to visit them personally – but was unsure of when that might be, so he felt it best to write this letter and send it off.

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

**<sup>13</sup>The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.**

If the elect woman of v. 1 is a local congregation, then her elect sister would be another local congregation, or the wider church.

### JOHN 3

**<sup>1</sup>The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:**

This letter begins just as 2 John did.

John identifies himself as “The elder.”

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

There are several men in the NT named Gaius and we simply do not know who this was.

All we know is that he was a personal acquaintance of John's and there was a special bond of affection between them.

**<sup>2</sup>Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. <sup>3</sup>For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth *that is in you, just as you walk in the truth.* <sup>4</sup>I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.**

Gaius was one of John's converts.

Word had reached John that he was doing well and that his testimony was bringing glory to the Lord.

Nothing could stoke John more so he expresses his desire that just as Gaius has prospered in spiritual things, he would also prosper in the things of *material* realm.

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

We pray that you would know the fullness of God's blessings, in body, soul and spirit.

But as we pray for you, we know that the blessings God desires for you are eternal blessings – things that last far longer than just a few days, or weeks or even years.

It is a far greater blessing to have the virtues of love and holiness cultivated in us than to live in an earthly mansion for 50 years.

It's a far greater blessing to step out in faith and see God's miraculous provision for going to The Sudan where you have the experience of leading others to eternal life than to live on a safe and quiet street in Ventura County.

So while we pray for you to be blessed in *every* area, we realize that God will use *whatever and only* those means necessary to deal to us the highest and eternal blessings.

And sometimes that means the prospering of the soul through the affliction of the flesh.

If that's the case, then our prayer is that you would quickly learn whatever the Lord is seeking to teach, so that you can know His material blessing too.

**<sup>5</sup>Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, <sup>6</sup>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,* <sup>7</sup>because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. <sup>8</sup>We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.**

There was a large number of missionaries and itinerant teachers that made their way among the churches during this time.

They depended on the generosity and hospitality of the believers and John is here commending this kind of assistance to those who were truly doing the work of promoting the Kingdom of God.

In 2 John, he'd made it clear that false teachers were to get no such assistance and hospitality but here he commends Gaius for being hospitable to true workers.

In fact, John says that those who house missionaries and itinerant teachers have become fellow-workers in their mission.

**<sup>9</sup>I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.**

John here gives an example of a guy who was 180 degrees different from Gaius and the kind of hospitality commended in the previous verses.

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

This man had set himself up as someone special who answered to no one.

When John had sent a letter to the church, Diotrephes had not passed it on to the congregation!

**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.

This guy sounds like a classic case of being on the road to becoming a cult!

Every cult is led by some single person who claims to be the sole authority who answers to no one.

He shuts his followers off from listening to anyone else for fear they will find something with which to question him.

That's what Diotrephes was doing with the people of his fellowship – shutting them off from outside sources and shunning any attempts to hold him accountable.

If anyone was found out listening to unapproved sources of info, Diotrephes would kick them out of the church.

It's sad to say there are a few pastors & elders today who are repeating the error of Diotrephes.

They're power-hungry tyrants whose whole attitude toward the church is, "My way or the highway."

Some pastors refuse to check their ideas against orthodoxy, against what other godly scholars and students of Scripture have gleaned from the word of God.

They come up with novel interpretations of scripture that find not a shred of support from anywhere else – but they feel totally justified in what they are teaching and if anyone dares to question them, they're excommunicated.

John says that if he gets a chance to go to Diotrephes' church, he'll confront him!

**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.

Surely John means this to be linked to v. 10 because if it stands alone it seems a warning to Gaius that he stands in little danger of.

It would seem that Gaius *knew* Diotrephes – and that in some way may have looked up to him.

This is pure conjecture on my part, but maybe Diotrephes and Gaius were pastors of nearby communities and Diotrephes had the larger church and a more notable ministry.

He was the "bigger" name if you will and John knew that Gaius might be overawed or tempted to envy.

This might move Gaius to start emulating what Diotrephes was doing.

So John says – "Gaius, don't follow in Diotrephes' footsteps. What he's doing is evil and I will rebuke Him for it when and if I get there. But in the meantime, make sure you don't follow his example. Keep doing good!"

Chuck Smith says that following the explosive growth of CCCM, they regularly had tours of pastors and church leaders from all over the world that would come by the church to try and figure out the secret of CC's success.

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

Success is attractive – and when a leader who's weak and insecure in his or her ability to lead sees success, there's a powerful temptation to *copy* that success.

It appears that Gaius – good man that he was, was in danger of falling into that trap and John cautions him here.

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

**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.

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

What John writes here points up the importance of *godly examples* as we follow the Lord.

We all know that we ought to look to Christ alone and not get wrapped up in adoring and worshiping man – but this doesn't mean that we can't look to other people as what it means to be 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.**

Then, right here in v. 11 John tells us to *imitate* what is 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?

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John closes this letter as he had the previous -

**<sup>13</sup>I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; <sup>14</sup>but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face.**

**Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.**

Most commentators think that the reason why John uses no names here at the end was because persecution was heating up and if this letter fell into the wrong hands, well, it could incriminate all those named and provide a list of people for the officials to go after.

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