

THE EPISTLE OF 2JOHN

1:1-3 The Elder

The apostle John calls himself "the Elder." As we have discussed, he was probably about 100 years old, and was certainly the last living apostle.

The Chosen Lady

He is writing to "the chosen lady and her children." I've read lots of arguments stating that this is a code word for the church. But I don't follow that metaphor. I've got no problem with the apostle John writing this letter to a woman, but if you are one who reads it as the church, no matter - the lessons are the same either way.

Truth And Love

John focuses a lot on truth. As a matter of fact, the word "truth" is used five times in the first four verses of this epistle alone. He also makes a real connection between the truth and love.

John loves this woman and her children. But he's not going to pull any punches with the truth. He knows that real love cannot compromise the truth, and vice versa.

1:4 Some Of Your Children

John had found out that some - but not all - of this women's children were walking in the truth. He was happy about the ones that were, but gravely concerned about the ones that weren't.

While reading this, one thought may have come to your mind: if this woman knows the truth, and it abides in her, then why aren't all of her children walking in the truth?

Well, you see this woman seems to have operated in a little too much grace. It appears that, while she was a very hospitable person, she had been too hospitable. She had not obeyed God's commandments of warning against false doctrines, and had welcomed false teachers into her home.

John's main point in writing this letter is to get her to stop this practice.

1:5-7 Many Deceivers

John encourages the woman in love, but makes it clear that nothing about love demands that we embrace false teachers.

They are deceivers. That word in Greek is "PLAN-os," and it means "misleaders, those who lead into error, cause wandering."

When this woman had deceivers - most likely the Gnostics, who denied Jesus had flesh - into her home, some of them had managed to deceive some of her children. They were led into error, and wandered away from the truth.

So, there are two main points here that we need to make sure we have down:

1) Love is not blind ecumenicalism. Love is walking according to God's commandments. The next time somebody says that your narrow-minded view of Christianity isn't loving, remind yourself that they have a different definition of love than God does.

2) (Like you haven't heard this a hundred times in the past few months here:) Beware of false teachers. They are evil and corrupting influences on you and your household. You may not feel that you will be led astray, but what about your kids?

1:8-9 Watch Yourself

We've got to watch ourselves, because it's possible to go backward - to lose what we have accomplished. People who have a foundation in the truth can let that foundation disintegrate and crumble by taking in the teaching of deceivers.

John says that anyone who goes too far doesn't have God. What is going too far? Not abiding in the teaching of Christ. If the Jesus they're teaching and preaching isn't the Jesus of the Bible, they are condemned heretics.

1:10-13 Do Not Receive Him

The epistles that we have just finished studying, 2Peter and 1John, contain many warnings against false teachers. I preached those principles just as hard as the original apostles wrote of them in their letters. But several people spoke or wrote to me in disagreement. They said that they could take in the good, and separate out the bad. That they were mature enough to know the difference,

They defended maintaining close friendships with people in cults, reading books of heretical teachers, or watching the television broadcasts of those who preach false doctrines.

They defended their actions, but they are in clear violation of God's Word. John makes it clear: Don't allow them into your home. Don't even give them a greeting.

This woman obviously thought that she was strong enough to withstand the false doctrines. That her Christian love would win out over their heresies. That her hospitality would break through their false doctrines. But in doing so, she had broken the commandment of God, and some of her children fell away from the faith.

The danger of false teachers is so great that John is more concerned with us preserving a Christian's soul than saving a heretic's soul.

THE EPISTLE OF 3JOHN

1:1-4 My Children

Although it is always possible that Gaius was John's biological son, it is more likely that he was one of John's converts.

Many times in the Bible, we see spiritual parenthood referred to in this way. For example, Peter referred to Mark as "my son" (1Pet. 5:13), as did Paul with Timothy (1Tim. 1:18). For that matter, Paul called the whole Galatian church,

Gal. 4:19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you

Real Prosperity

I've heard the Faith Movement's preachers quote this verse numer-

ous times, using it as justification for their belief that "prosperity" means health and wealth.

But if you really read this, you'll notice that Gaius' soul was prospering, but his health wasn't.

And John didn't tell him, "Gaius, if you would just walk a good Christian walk in faith, you'd have health." Instead, he said, "I'm hearing reports that you are walking a good Christian walk in faith. And I'm praying that God will grant you prosperity in your health, too."

1:5-8 Acting Faithfully To The Brethren

John had encountered some Christians who gave him an update about Gaius. They said how much his Christianity was demonstrated in his actions. He showed great faithfulness towards evangelists and missionaries, blessed them the same way Jesus would bless them.

John points out also that when we support people like this, we become fellow workers with them.

1:9-11 Diotrophes

Not everybody in Gaius' church was like him. A man named Diotrophes rejected John's earlier letter because of his own pride. He obviously didn't like the fact that John had status in the church greater than his own.

And he was so threatened by visiting Christian teachers that not only would he not allow them to teach in his church, but anyone who showed them hospitality would be kicked out of the church!

Sometimes, mature Christian people just like Gaius have a hard time recognizing prideful leaders like Diotrophes in their own churches. Here's a great way to identify them: Are they saying that they're the only ones with the truth? To beware of all other churches, because they're preaching lies?

Today, we see this sort of behavior most prominently in the "independent" movement, with the "us four and no more" attitude.

Are all other denominations "heretics"? Is everyone who's not going to their church going to hell? Someone who holds to that attitude is a

Diotrephes. If John were here today, he would call him out in public.

I also want to take this opportunity to once more point out that John had no problem naming names, both privately and publicly. I believe that for all the reasons people have stopped attending this church, the biggest cause is when I call heretics by name. Many popular preachers are preaching a very different Jesus than the Bible presents, and I name them publicly.

People complain that I name these people, saying, "It's not loving, it's not Christian." I insist that it is both loving and necessary.

Paul called out men like Alexander (1Tim 1:19-20, 2Tim. 4:14), Hoo-men-AH-yos (1Tim. 1:19-20, 2Tim 2:17-18), and Fil-ay-TOS (2Tim 2:17-18), saying that they their faith had shipwrecked, that they were blasphemers to be handed over to Satan, and that they had gone astray from the truth, with their talk spreading like gangrene.

Jesus called out the Pharisees personally, and said Herod was a deceitful fox (Luke 13:32). He singled out Jezebel in the church of Thyatira as an immoral false teacher (Rev. 2:20-23).

And John - the apostle of LOVE - warns against Diotrephes by name.

Once again, we're reminded by John that love without truth isn't love.

1:12 Good Testimony

Credit where credit is due: truthful love also includes naming good names. John points out that Demetrius had a great reputation with him and everybody else. There are so many names in the New Testament that are called positively, I couldn't begin to list even a fraction of them.

1:13-14 Peace Be To You

As in the previous letter, John had lots of stuff to say, but wanted to do it in person. And so he signs off with greetings from the church, and says, "Peace be to you."