

Beloved: A Study of 1, 2, & 3 John
Lesson Nine - Be Real
2 John 1-13

Bible scholars have differing opinions on whether John wrote this letter to a particular woman and her children or specific church and her members. It is generally believed John penned this brief letter to address a particular set of circumstances. John wrote to his much beloved readers to encourage them to walk in love balanced with truth, a thread that is woven throughout all of his writings. And with great urgency, he instructs the recipients of his letter to beware of false teachers who deny the deity of Christ.

I. John's Concern (2 John 1-3)

John refers to himself as "the elder." This is most likely not a reference to an office of the church, but rather a term of endearment and respect, in much the same way we might identify someone as an "elder statesman." To his readers he was the oldest and wisest shepherd of them all, the last living apostle. John was highly revered and deeply loved.

While most Bible scholars believe the letter is written to a specific church and her members rather than a particular woman, it is impossible to know for certain. It is interesting that John hides his identity and that of his addressees. Perhaps this was because of the growing persecution against Jesus-followers. He may have wanted to avoid drawing unwanted attention to himself or expose the location of his recipients to enemies of the faith. We cannot know for certain and can only guess at the reason behind John's omission. Regardless, the Holy Spirit moved on John to write the letter to all who believe in Jesus. John's message is as relevant today as it was nearly 2000 years ago when he put pen to paper or, more accurately, quill to parchment.

In John's brief salutation (2 John 1-3), he uses the word "truth" four times. If my word count is accurate, his greeting consists of 66 words and 4 of them are the word "truth." Truth shows up again in 2 John 4. Don't overlook the fact that in his short epistle, he uses the word "truth" five times. The relationship John has with "the chosen lady and her children" (2 John 1) is founded on truth. In 1 John 1:3, John writes that he is proclaiming what he has seen and heard "so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." All genuine fellowship is rooted and grounded in "truth."

John MacArthur writes, Believers must be committed to the truth, because we exist in the world, which is the realm of Satan (1 John 5:19), the "father of lies" (John 8:44). He strives to keep sinners from understanding and believing the truth; he is "the god of this world [who] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). (John MacArthur, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 214)

John blesses his readers with grace, mercy, and peace in truth and love, aspects that characterize his own ministry and gifts that we have received “from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father” (2 John 3). These are love gifts that are guaranteed for all believers.

John Phillips expounds:

Grace, peace, mercy—that’s what Satan is up against when he attacks a believer. He may win some tactical battles, but he cannot win the war. *Grace* means that the limitless resources of God’s lovingkindness and tender mercy have been harnessed on the believer’s behalf. God’s unmerited and unbounded favor cuts all the ground from beneath the Enemy’s feet. *Peace* means the war is over; it has already been won. As a result of Calvary, Satan’s activities are severely restricted (Colossians 2:14–15). He can act only by divine permission and under divine supervision and in accordance with the mystery of God’s permissive will. *Mercy* means that God will not allow Satan to go any further against us than we are able to bear and that, in each case, a way of escape is provided for us (1 Corinthians 10:13).

All this is assured by God the Father and God the Son. John here deliberately equates the Son with the Father as coequal, coexistent, and coeternal. Satan, for all his diligence and resourcefulness, is on the losing side. (John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*, p. 194-195)

Beloved, the secret to the abundant Christian life is to abide in Jesus. When we abide in Him, we operate in His *truth* and we demonstrate His *love* by the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a lifestyle demonstrates our conversion is real!

II. John’s Commendation (2 John 4-6)

John affirms those who are “walking in truth” (2 John 4). Their discipline and diligence bring great joy to the heart of the aged apostle knowing God has believers in place who are being raised up behind him who will protect the integrity of the Scriptures, even after he has graduated to Glory. This is the fifth and final mention of the word *truth* in his pastoral postcard designated as 2 John. His repetitious use of words such as *truth*, *love*, and *abide* is by design to emphasize their importance in the Christian life. John’s focus is the gospel and the transformed life it makes possible. We need to know His Word and hide it in our hearts is so that we can live accordingly.

Along with having a working knowledge of the truth of His Word, we should be known by our love for one another.

Danny Akin explains:

Wrong thinking inevitably leads to wrong living. If the mind is confused, the heart will be corrupted. Right thinking, however, is the right soil from which emerges the

fruit of right living. For John, right living is a life of love that is the supernatural response to the love one experiences in the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Danny Akin, *Exalting Jesus in 1,2,3 John*, p. 155-156.)

Love is a thread that runs throughout the New Testament and is divinely displayed on the cross of Calvary. Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Having received a love that bankrupted Heaven when God sent His Only Begotten Son to die for our sins, it follows that the only reasonable response to so great a salvation is to love God and love our brothers and sisters in the household of faith, as well as those outside the faith.

John says, "And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it" (2 John 6).

David Walls and Max Anders note:

What is love? It plays itself out in the real world in obedience. The essence of love is that we keep God's commandments. This glorifies God, is best for others, and is best for us. Everything God asks of us is intended to give something good to us or keep us from harm. (D. Walls & M. Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, p. 237)

The command to "love one another" is nothing new to the recipients of John's letter. From the beginning of their Christian experience, they were aware of a command given directly to John by Jesus. In John 13:34-35 Jesus says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Love is the outward expression of the internal heart transformation done at the moment of conversion by Calvary's Lamb. Such a lifestyle demonstrates our conversion is real!

III. John's Caution (2 John 7-11)

False teachers were a very real threat to the early church, even as they are today. John recognized the danger of error being introduced into the church which was populated by relatively new converts. As the last living apostle, he was painfully aware of the possibility of these fledgling churches being infiltrated and possibly captivated by charming and mesmerizing false teachers who were intentionally perverting the simple message of the gospel. John remembered Jesus' words, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." Beloved, it incumbent upon us to know the *truth* of God's Word. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). For a child of God to

be drawn away from the truth of God's Word results not in the loss of salvation (John 10:27-30), but the loss of spiritual reward.

False teachers do not hold to the doctrinal teaching of Christ. They typically mix in enough truth to make their words seem plausible, but they are Satan's mouthpiece to shipwreck the faith of believers who are not fully grounded, seduce seekers who are spiritually interested in Jesus but not yet saved, and deceive unbelievers. John warns his readers not to receive false teachers into their home.

Walls and Anders write:

These verses seem harsh. Those who remain faithful to the teaching of Christ must resist those who do not. If a person did not teach truth about Jesus, these believers were not to practice hospitality toward him. This does not suggest that we are not to be cordial to false teachers, or that we cannot invite a member of a false sect into our home to talk with him. Rather, it refers to a level of hospitality that helps the false teacher spread his or her false doctrine.

In the first century, traveling was difficult. The traveler could not find hotels and restaurants. Traveling teachers and missionaries depended on others to house and feed them. John urged his readers not to "fund" these false teachers by housing and feeding them. To do so would be to share in his wicked work. (D. Walls & M. Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, p. 238)

Some Biblical scholars teach we should not engage with false teachers on any level. John Phillips is one of those. His insight on this passage is worth looking at:

John has some more advice: refuse the apostate your handshake when he goes: "Neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (vv. 10b-11, KJV). A person who comes to one's house professing to be a legitimate evangelist but who is in reality a cultist and an enemy of the faith is a scoundrel and, as such, forfeits the right even to the common courtesy of a greeting or a farewell.

Once the person has been unmasked, and this is to take place at the door, that person must be summarily dismissed. To receive him or her into one's house as though he or she were a believer is to be disloyal, in fact, to the Lord, whom this person denies. It gives the intruder an opportunity to make friends and contacts, exposes one's family members and the local church to false teaching, and helps to confirm the cultist in his errors. It also means that we have personal fellowship in the damage the heretic is doing because, in effect, we are condoning his or her heretical doctrine. (John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*, p. 206)

I have purposely given you two somewhat opposing views on this text. My admonition for you is to prayerfully get your instructions from the Lord on how to respond. At any rate, John is warning believers not to allow false teachers to take advantage of the hospitality of local Christians and use it as an opportunity to propagate their false theology.

IV. John's Closing (2 John 12-13)

As John draws his short letter to a close, he declares his intention to come and speak to the recipients of his pastoral postcard face-to-face, knowing a reunion would bring great joy. He purposes to address some of the issues in person rather than through a written note. He closes with greetings from a sister church. As I close out this lesson I want to remind you of just how loved you are and how God loves to speak to you face to face:

God has already set His good plan in motion, and He is using it to bless us and glory Himself. And we can't mess it up or derail it! He's working out His plan, right now. Your life isn't a decision you have to make; it's a secret you get to hear. And it is spoken from the heart of a sovereign, loving God. He's where the joy is! (Tara-Leigh Cobble, *The Bible Recap*)

Beloved, we are loved by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. In order to run well and finish strong, we must know the truth, grow in the truth, and stand firm on the truth as a living example of what it means to follow Christ. Love, grounded in truth, should be the reoccurring theme of our lives and proof positive that our conversion experience is real.