

## 2 John

*The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:*

*Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.*

*I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.*

*Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.*

*Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.*

*The children of your elect sister greet you.*

(Prayer)

In May 2023, a 36-year-old woman died attempting a 17-mile rim to river to rim hike in the Grand Canyon. The cause of her death was exercise-associated hyponatremia, commonly called water intoxication. What led to this tragic death for this young woman? Simply put, too much water and not enough electrolytes. Two things essential for survival in the rigors of the Grand Canyon were severely out of balance and her body could not recover.

As tragic as this story is, there is an even more tragic imbalance that we face as followers of Jesus Christ. We are on a journey more rigorous than a 17-mile hike in the Grand Canyon, and we cannot tackle it out of balance. Fortunately, God has provided for us an encouragement, a warning and a challenge here in the short little book of 2 John.

### Here is a quick outline of 2 John

- I. Greeting (vv 1-3)
- II. The Elder's Joy and Request (vv 4-6)
- III. The Elder's Warning (7-8)
- IV. The Elder's Challenge (9-11)
- V. Farewell (12-13)

Interestingly scholars believe that 1, 2 and 3 John are all part of a package of letters that were sent by John to a specific church all at the same time. 1 John, which was preached last week was a sermon sent by John for the entire church body. 2 John is a more personal letter sent to the same church but was intended for specific encouragement and instruction. Finally, 3 John which you will hear about next week was a very personal note to a specific individual within that same church.

Also of note, John does not identify himself in any of these letters. One may ask how we know that John was the author. There are many similarities between these letters and the gospel of John, the focus on love, the significance that Jesus is the Christ and the insistence on abiding in Christ all lead scholars to believe that the apostle John wrote these letters.

But what about our spiritual hyponatremia? What are John's concerns about a potentially tragic imbalance in our lives? Look with me again at verses 4-5.

**I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another.**

Before we dive in, there is one more thing we need to understand. John loves to use metaphor. Think back to the gospel of John. What self-descriptive

statements of Jesus does John record? The metaphoric ones. "I am the bread of life." "I am the light of the world." "I am the vine." And so on.

This letter is no different. The lady and her children highly likely were not a specific woman and her kids. The lady is the church receiving this letter and her children are those who call it home. Likewise, her sister in verse 13 is likely the church John was writing from. So, John's challenge here is to those who call themselves Christians and call themselves faithful participants in the life of the church. In other words, most of us.

As you look at these verses, what stands out? It's truth and love, isn't it? Looking at v4 solidifies it. John wants this church (and our church) to concentrate on, to replenish and to balance out truth and love.

The first thing John wants the church to know is that they are headed in the right direction and they have the right gear. Like most people who attempt a significant hike in the Grand Canyon with both water and electrolytes, the recipients of this letter are walking in truth and love. We see it right here and in verse 4.

What does that mean? Reading God's word. Grasping the truth of the gospel. Understanding that our faith in Christ requires us to see the world differently. Showing compassion for those who are different than us. Extending forgiveness to those who have wronged us. And grasping that love often requires sacrifice.

But where can this go wrong? How can a tragic imbalance occur? Consider these all-too-common situations: First, a person or a church experience some sort of heresy. They correctly pursue the truth, seeking to protect themselves and others from a similar fate. They become experts in the facet of truth that would prevent such a heresy from ever coming close again. In fact, they may even expand their repertoire to address other heresies or even other controversial topics. They become doctrinally pure and are supremely confident that they are purveyors of the truth. But what is lost? Where is the heart for those stuck in the heresy? Where is the Christ-like compassion that sees lost people not as arguments to be won, but as sheep that need a

shepherd? I have lived this. I was unbalanced. And I stumbled on the rigorous journey of my own Christian life.

In the second, there is a person or a church that has experienced a difficult interpersonal conflict. A pastor has been dismissed or there has been a close personal betrayal. There is more hurt than seems possible to bear. But to move on, the love of Christ is embraced and displayed. Forgiveness is sought with an ever-increasing frequency. Hard words are avoided because love bears all things. The broken and the struggling are welcomed and included but no change is required since God loves us as we are. But what is lost? Where is the call to discipleship and to following after Jesus? Where is the response to Jesus' call to enter through the narrow gate and walk on the hard path and to endure faithfully until the end? I have lived this too. Here also I was unbalanced and stumbled on the difficult journey of my own Christian life.

Do you see the challenge we each must face? Truth and love. Water and electrolytes. Easy to do at the beginning, difficult to maintain throughout our lives. For those of us who desire the truth, who pursue it with a passion, who want to refute all the trinitarian heresies or combat Islam or confront Mormonism or face deconstructionism head on or a hundred other things: thank you. Your pursuit of the truth keeps the church pure and strong. But believe me, it is easy to lose sight of love. It is easy to forget that faith is not just an argument to be won. It is easy to treat people as chess pieces and forget that each of us are complex relational creatures created in the image of God.

And those of us who simply want to love on people, to open our homes and our lives to others regardless of where they are at spiritually, thank you. You are the heartbeat of this church, and you are the epitome of Jesus' example of love in Jn 13. But believe me, it is easy to lose sight of truth. Does it really matter what someone believes as long as they say they love Jesus? Does it really matter if a person makes progress in their Christian life as long as they say they are forgiven. And its easy to forget that Jesus called us to build on the rock of his teaching.

John brings this point home to us in verse 6:

**And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.**

In verse 5 the church is commended for following through on Jesus' command to love one another. Here he makes sure we know that loving one another means following Jesus' commands. Which commands? Unfortunately, John is decidedly ambiguous. It could be the command to love one another, but that seems redundant since this church in particular was just commended for obeying that command. Any other specific command would simply be a guess without much foundation. Perhaps the best option is that the command John's referring to is Jesus' call to follow him.

Think about it. In the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, disciples in general were men chosen by a rabbi to follow him, learn from him, to basically to become like him and then go out and begin again. Consider Elijah and Elisha in 1 & 2 Kings. So, the all-encompassing command for us to follow Christ is the one that includes all the others and also balances both truth with love.

But what is John's purpose? Why is he so emphatic that this church, already strong in truth and love, continue pursuing both. Think of it this way: why keep drinking water even though you're halfway through your Grand Canyon hike? Why continue to consume electrolytes even though you've done so consistently before? His purpose, in short, is the same as one of his main purposes in 1 Jn, to keep us safe from false teaching.

Look at the warning in verses 7-9

**For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.**

At first blush you may be asking why would a church need a warning against people who are proclaiming Jesus was not fully man. Sure, in John's day many

subscribed to the twin heresies of Gnosticism and Docetism, which ascribed evil to the flesh and thus believed that Jesus only seemed human. But today? In the church?

But let's think a little harder about our own lives and how this may affect us more than we realize. Here's just one example. Jesus calls us to give our lives to serve his bride, the body of Christ. That could be financially. That could be through service. That could be through building and maintaining strong relationships. That could be fervent and regular prayer. But I would submit some of us, maybe most of us have made some excuse to do something less. Give less. Serve less. Connect less. Pray less. And we justify it by saying "Jesus you just don't understand." You haven't been in my financial situation. You haven't experienced my busy life. You haven't met these people.

Do you see what we're doing? We're robbing Jesus of his full humanity. We may not be Docetists in our creeds, but we can act like them in our practice. Know this: Jesus does understand. Jesus is our great and sympathetic high priest. He knows hunger. He knows hurt. He knows long days. He knows short nights. He knows delays. He knows loss. He knows betrayal. And...he knows you. He knows exactly what you're going through. Because he came in the flesh.

John's desire for us is that we would not lose our reward. His concern is not our eternal reward, which was secured by Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Rather it is our reward today for following him. Please do not hear me say prosperity gospel. He is simply underscoring a principle found throughout scripture: God rewards those who seek him and follow him. Heb 12:6; Eph 6:1-3 or the entire book of Proverbs

But I feel compelled to add one thing. If you truly doubt that Jesus was fully God and also fully man, you are not a Christian. God's word is clear both here and throughout the New Testament, Jesus was both 100% human and also 100% divine. Can I fit that into my small little brain? Not always. But my lack of comprehension doesn't make it less true.

Herein lies the warning. From John's perspective, if we are not abiding in the teachings of Christ, we are abiding in the teachings that are anti Christ. I

realize we live in a pluralistic society and such black and white statements hit us hard. But John is not alone.

### **Matthew 16:22-23**

**And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."**

### **Ephesians 4:26-27**

**Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.**

### **2 Corinthians 11:14-15**

**And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.**

### **1 Peter 5:8-9**

**Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.**

Even as I read these I am thinking, this task is too much for me. For any of us. If you are thinking the same thing, you're right. We can't do this. Not on our own. That's John's point! We must abide in Christ and in his teachings. We must nourish ourselves in truth and in love. If we do not, we will falter and fail on our journey of this life.

Now John issues us a challenge. What do we do when people don't embrace the truth or the love of Christ? John's challenge to this particular church was as follows in vv 10-11:

**If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.**

Is John telling us not to open our homes or our churches to unbelievers or perhaps those who are wrestling with the claims of Christ. I don't think so. The key in v10 is the phrase "bring this teaching". It is one thing to invite a Mormon into to your home to share the gospel with him. It is another thing to have him lead your small group discussion. It is one thing to have someone who is wrestling with deconstructing their faith sitting here under the sound of the gospel. It is another to welcome them to preach from this pulpit.

John's concerns are our concerns. We are the flock of God. There are ravenous wolves who would love nothing more than to destroy what Jesus has purchased by his own blood (Act 20:28-29) We as elders have the primary responsibility to protect you from these threats. But each of us have a role to play. What do you read? Who do you listen to? What teaching are you exposing yourself to? This should be our paradigm:

**Proverbs 2:1-6, 20**

**My child, if you receive my words  
and treasure up my commandments with you,  
making your ear attentive to wisdom  
and inclining your heart to understanding;  
yes, if you call out for insight  
and raise your voice for understanding,  
if you seek it like silver  
and search for it as for hidden treasures,  
then you will understand the fear of the LORD  
and find the knowledge of God.**

**For the LORD gives wisdom;**



**from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;**

**So you will walk in the way of the good**

**and keep to the paths of the righteous.**

What should we take away from this short little letter? First is John's call for us to pursue both truth and love. Truth through knowing what God's word says. Through study, through meditation, through prayer, through discussion with others. And love through following Jesus' example, through seeking the fruit of the Spirit, through considering others before ourselves, through the realization that as we have freely received the love of Christ, we are to freely give it away.

The second is this: our spiritual lives, our journey with Christ should always be about balance. Not unlike having water and electrolytes in our bodies as we traverse the rigors of the Grand Canyon, we need to have balance in all aspects of spiritual lives. I have spoken extensively on truth *and* love. But we've also talked about Jesus' divinity *and* his humanity. We need to cling to both. There is the cross *and* the resurrection. They are different events which accomplished different things. Yet they are inextricably linked. I could go on: the law *and* the gospel. Faith *and* works. Grace *and* obedience. Promises *and* fulfillment. Plus, so many more.

Let me wrap this up with one simple suggestion. If this seems too basic perhaps it can serve as your steppingstone. Regardless, here is my suggestion: honestly ask God for his assessment of your walk with Christ. Where are you succeeding? Where are you struggling? Where are you failing? And brothers, sisters, my friends, would you listen for God's response?

Here is a final thought from Oswald Chambers:

What hinders me from hearing is my attention to other things. It is not that I don't want to hear God, but I am not devoted in the right areas of my life. I am devoted to things and even to service and my own convictions. God may say whatever He wants, but I just don't hear Him. But once I hear Him, I will exclaim, "How slow I have been to listen and understand what God has been telling me!"

**1 Sam 3:10c "Speak Lord, for your servant hears."**

(Prayer)