

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 23, 2024 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



THAT YOU MAY KNOW – A STUDY OF 1,2 & 3 JOHN *Prescription for a Healthy Church* 2 John 1-6

“¹The Elder, 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, ²because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: ³Grace, 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. Walk in Christ’s Commandments ⁴I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. ⁵And 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. ⁶This 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.” – 2 John 1-6 (NKJV)

BACKGROUND AND SETTING FOR 2 JOHN:

(1) **TITLE = 2 John** - The epistle’s title is “2 John.” It is the second in a series of 3 epistles that bear the Apostle John’s name.

Characteristics:

- **2 John is a conventional letter** - Second and Third John present the closest approximation in the NT to the conventional letter form of the contemporary Greco-Roman world, since they were addressed from an individual to individuals
- **One of the shortest letters in the New Testament** - Second and Third John are the shortest epistles in the NT

- *2 John contains less than 300 words in the Greek* - each containing less than 300 Greek words
- *2 John could fit on a single papyrus sheet* – 2 John could fit on a single papyrus sheet

- (2) **AUTHOR = The Apostle John, “The Elder”** - The author is the Apostle John. He describes himself in 2 John 1 as “The Elder” which conveys the advanced age of the apostle, his authority, and status during the foundational period of Christianity when he was involved with Jesus’ ministry
- (3) **DATE = A.D. 90-95** - The precise date of the epistle cannot be determined. Since the wording, subject matter, and circumstances of 2 John closely approximate 1 John (v. 5 [cf. 1 John 2:7; 3:11]; v. 6 [cf. 1 John 5:3]; v. 7 [cf. 1 John 2:18–26]; v. 9 [cf. 1 John 2:23]; v. 12; [cf. 1 John 1:4]), most likely John composed the letter at the same time or soon after 1 John, ca. A. D. 90–95, during his ministry at Ephesus in the latter part of his life.
- (4) **RECIPIENT(S) = Elect land and her children (local house-church)** - The strategic difference is that while 1 John has no specific individual or church specified to whom it was addressed (1 John was most likely a circular letter), 2 John has a particular local group or house-church in mind (v. 1). The individual addressed in the greeting (v. 1) inadvertently or unwisely may have shown these false prophets hospitality, or John may have feared that the false teachers would attempt to take advantage of her kindness (vv. 10, 11). The apostle seriously warns his recipient (and us as his readers today) against showing hospitality to such deceivers (vv. 10, 11). Although his exhortation may appear on the surface to be harsh or unloving, the acutely dangerous nature of their teaching justified such actions, especially since it threatened to destroy the very foundations of the faith (v. 9).
- (5) **PURPOSE = Warning of Gnostic false teachers** - Second John deals with the same problem as 1 John (see Introduction to 1 John: Background and Setting). False teachers influenced by the beginnings of Gnostic thought were threatening the church (v. 7; cf. 1 John 2:18, 19, 22, 23; 4:1–3). The focus of 2 John is that the false teachers were conducting an itinerant ministry among John’s congregations, seeking to make converts, and taking advantage of Christian hospitality to advance their cause (vv. 10, 11; cf. Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9).
- (6) **HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL THEMES = Back to Christian basics** - The overall theme of 2 John closely parallels 1 John’s theme of a “recall to the fundamentals of the faith” or “back to the basics of Christianity” (vv. 4–6). For John, the basics of Christianity are summarized

Summary of Christian Basics: (in 2 John)

- **Adherence to the truth** (v.4) -
- **Practice of love** (v.5) -
- **Walking in obedience** (v.6) -
- **Biblical guidelines for Christian hospitality** – This is a key point of this short letter. The apostle, however, conveys an additional but related theme in 2 John: “the biblical guidelines for hospitality.” Not only are Christians to adhere to the fundamentals of the faith, but the gracious hospitality that is commanded of them (Rom. 12:13) must be discriminating. The basis of hospitality must be common love of or interest in the truth, and Christians must share their love within the confines of that truth. They are not called to universal acceptance of anyone who claims to be a believer. Love must be discerning. Hospitality and kindness must be focused on those who are adhering to the fundamentals of the faith. Otherwise, Christians may actually aid those who are attempting to destroy those basic truths of the faith. Sound doctrine must serve as the test of fellowship and the basis of separation between those who profess to be Christians and those who actually are (vv. 10, 11; cf. Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:8, 9; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10).

INTERPRETIVE CHALLENGES IN 2 JOHN

Challenges:

- **Ecumenism** – (*ek - que - men - ism*) Second John stands in direct antithesis (opposition, contrast, reverse) to the frequent cry for ecumenism (the principle or aim of promoting unity among the world's Christian Churches... one world church) and Christian unity among believers.
 - **The balance between love and truth** - Love and truth are inseparable in Christianity. Truth must always guide the exercise of love (cf. Eph. 4:15). Love must stand the test of truth. The main lesson of this book is that truth determines the bounds of love, and as a consequence, of unity. Therefore, truth must exist before love can unite, for truth generates love (1 Pet. 1:22). When someone compromises the truth, true Christian love and unity are destroyed. Only a shallow sentimentalism exists where the truth is not the foundation of unity.
 - **Who is the elect lady and her children?** - The reference to the “elect lady and her children” (v. 1) should be understood in a normal, plain sense referring to a particular woman and her children rather than interpreted in a non- literal sense as a church and its membership. Similarly, the reference to “the children of your elect sister” (v. 13) should be understood as a reference to the nieces and/or nephews of the individual addressed in verse 1, rather than metaphorically to a sister church and its membership. In these verses, John conveys greetings to personal acquaintances that he has come to know through his ministry.
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If you have a desire to see God’s kingdom come, then at times you probably nostalgically think about the New Testament church and imagine...

- “It must have been wonderful to be a part of the church in that time!”
- “If only we could duplicate that now!”
- Imagine being a part of a church that had been founded about 30 years previously by the apostle Paul.
- Timothy had served as a pastor there.
- After he moved on, none other than the venerable apostle John had shepherded the flock.
- Wouldn’t it be great to be a part of a church like that!

I’ve just described the church at Ephesus...

- Most scholars agree that John wrote his first letter (that we just completed) to that church (and other churches in that area), sometime around 90-95 A.D.
- But as we saw in our study of that letter, that church had some difficult problems. False teachers had arisen in the church, who claimed to have deeper knowledge of the things of God.
- They claimed to have the secret to knowing Christ, but in reality, they denied His bodily incarnation and His deity. They taught many other heretical concepts.
- Their motive may have been to take some elements of pagan religion and blend them with Christianity, in order to make it more acceptable to the pagan culture (Glenn Barker, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* [Zondervan], ed. by Frank Gaebelin, 12:296).
- When the godly church leaders confronted their errors, these men left the church to form their own churches, taking people with them, resulting in major conflict (1 John 2:19).
- As in any church split, relationships were strained or severed. People were confused and hurt. Rumors and false allegations circulated. So there was a need for godly leaders to bring the church back to the basics of the faith.

Every church needs to be strong in the knowledge of the truth so that the members can avoid destructive heresies. They need to be strong in loving relationships. They need to be holy in their conduct. Without these things, the church will be unhealthy and thus more susceptible to the subtle deception of the enemy.

John probably wrote the short letter of 2 John to a local church as a brief follow-up to his first letter. He repeats many of the same ideas and addresses some of the same problems. Apparently, the false teachers were traveling around, trying to come into the churches under the guise of godly teachers who could take you farther in your Christian faith (2 John 9). But they denied essential truth about Jesus Christ. So John writes this short letter before he could make a personal visit, to warn the church about not receiving these men into their midst. In doing so, he gives us a prescription for a healthy church.

There are two parts:

2 Parts to 2 John: For the Church to Be Healthy:

- (1) For the church to be healthy, she must be sensitive to the life within (2 John 1-6) -**
- (2) For the church to be healthy, she must be on guard to the dangers without (2 John 7-13)**

We will look at the first part today and the second part in our next week...

KEY THOUGHT: For the church to be healthy, she must be sensitive to the life within

Again, there are two major interpretive problems in 2 John.

2 Major Interpretative Problems in 2 John: *(we've already somewhat addressed and answered these on some level, but we want to probe them a little deeper)*

- (1) Who is "the elder" who writes this letter?**
- (2) Who is "the elect lady and her children" to whom it is written?**

The first one we have already addressed. Without going into the scholarly debates, I believe that "the elder" was the apostle John as we've already said. He was so well known to this local church that he didn't need to mention his given name. The terms "elder," "overseer" (or, "bishop"), and "pastor" ("shepherd") are used interchangeably in the New Testament to refer to local church leaders (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2). John was an apostle, who had authority from Christ over all of the churches. But, he was also a part of a local congregation, where he served as elder. The apostle Peter referred to himself as an elder in this same sense (1 Pet. 5:1). Due to John's age and the fact that he was the last surviving apostle, perhaps the churches nicknamed him "the elder," par excellence. It is a title both of respect and authority.

With regard to the question of "the chosen lady and her children," there are two views.

2 Views of "The elect land and her children":

- (1) A specific lady and her offspring -** Some think that it refers to a specific woman and her children (John MacArthur adopts this view, *The MacArthur Study Bible* [Thomas

Nelson], p. 1946). With this view, the “*children of your chosen sister*” (v. 13) would be the nieces and nephews of this woman.

- (2) **The local church and its members** - But most commentators lean toward the view that it is a cryptic reference to a local church and its members. “*The children of your chosen sister*” would then be the members of another local church. If the church was going through any persecution, referring to it in this cryptic manner would provide some protection if this letter fell into the wrong hands.

We cannot be dogmatic but I think that John wrote 2 John to a local church. The language, especially John’s affirmation of love and exhortation to love (1, 5), seems more appropriate to a church than to an individual woman. If it was written to an individual, verse 4 would require that she had several children, some of whom were following the truth. Also, in verses 6, 8, 10, and 12, John addresses his readers in the second person plural, which would point to the members of a local church. The imagery of a church as a chosen lady fits with the church as the bride of Christ. In a similar way, Peter calls the church in Rome, “she who is in Babylon, chosen together with you” (1 Pet. 5:13).

★ **The immediate problem John is addressing in both 2 and 3 John is that of traveling teachers that were circulating among the churches.**

- They were generally received into the church and given hospitality in various homes.
- But what if the teacher claimed to be a Christian, but taught false doctrine?
- Should he be received or not?
- 2 John warns against receiving and encouraging such false teachers, whereas 3 John encourages genuine hospitality towards true teachers.

John had recently had contact with some of the members of this church. He commends the church that these members were walking in the truth (v. 4). He is not necessarily implying that others were not walking in the truth, but rather, he was glad that those whom he had met were walking in the truth. In verses 1-6, he gives a fourfold prescription for the life within the church if we want the church to be healthy:

Four-fold Prescription for Healthy Life Within the Church:

- (1) **The life within the church centers on a personal relationship with the Father through the Son, based on His sovereign grace**
- (2) **The life within the church is founded on the truth about Jesus Christ**
- (3) **The life within the church expresses itself in love**
- (4) **The life within the church is maintained through obedience**

THE LIFE WITHIN THE CHURCH CENTERS ON A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER THROUGH THE SON, BASED ON HIS SOVEREIGN GRACE

This idea underlies the entire letter, but it is especially obvious in the salutation in verses 1-3... notice it there, ¹*The Elder, 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,* ²*because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:* ³*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. Walk in Christ's Commandments.* Both in verse 1 and in verse 13, John uses the adjective “*elect*” (or chosen) to refer to these two churches. This does not refer to our choosing God, but rather to His choosing us to be His people. The initiative in salvation lies with God's sovereign choice. When you choose to believe in Jesus Christ, it is because God has first chosen you for salvation. God did not choose us because He saw that we would choose Him or because He saw great potential in us. Rather, He chose us through grace alone. This robs us of any source of pride.

Why does John emphasize God's choice both at the start and close of this short letter? I believe that it is because the reality that God chose us to be His children gives comfort when we are under attack or going through trials. These churches had gone through turmoil when the false teachers caused confusion and division. It would be a comfort to be reminded that God had initiated their salvation and He would complete what He started (Phil. 1:6). The false teachers would not and could not undermine what God sovereignly purposes to do in His church.

➡ The threefold opening greeting (v. 3), “Grace, mercy and peace,” occurs elsewhere only in 1 & 2 Timothy. B. F. Westcott (*The Epistles of St. John* [Eerdmans], p. 225) observes, “The succession ‘grace, mercy, peace’ marks the order from the first motion of God to the final satisfaction of man.” Any relationship with God begins not with our seeking God, but rather with His sovereign grace reaching down to us. As Paul puts it (Rom. 5:6), “*For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly*” (not, “for pretty good folks who were making an effort to seek God”).

3 Things that Point to God's Initiative in our Salvation:

- (1) **Grace** = God's **unmerited favor** to the *ungodly* who deserve His wrath -
- (2) **Mercy** = God's **compassion** towards us in our **misery** that is due to our **sin** - The focus of God's *grace* is more towards our guilt and need for forgiveness of sins, whereas *mercy* is directed towards relieving the devastating consequences of our sins.
- (3) **Peace** = **The result of salvation, both to the peace of God in our hearts and to the peace that we enjoy with God because of the cross of Christ** - We are reconciled to God because Christ bore the penalty in our place. The cross removed the barrier to fellowship with God, so that now we can enter His presence as His children and know that we are accepted.

John's salutation varies from the usual form of a prayer, “Grace, mercy, and peace be with you.” Rather, John emphatically (in the Greek text) states, “³*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. Walk in Christ's Commandments."

Each of these variations from the norm reflects something of John's concern in writing this brief letter (Colin Kruse, *The Letters of John* [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 206; the following observations are from him).

3 Observations From Verse 3 of John's Salutation:

- (1) **OBSERVATION #1 = God's faithful presence** - The emphatic "*will be with you*" reassures his readers that God will not abandon them, in spite of what the secessionists might say. He uses "you" (as "you all") to "reinforce the sense of their community of love."
- (2) **OBSERVATION #2 = Affirming the deity of Jesus** - The truth that these blessings come not only from the Father, but also "*from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father,*" brings out the truth of the deity of Jesus, in opposition to the teaching of the heretics.
- (3) **OBSERVATION #3 = Holding to the practice of truth and love** - "*In truth and love*" probably means that these blessings are experienced by those who continue to hold to the truth and practice love for one another, which the heretics failed to do.

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Some Questions to Ponder:

1. *How do people join our church (by letter, statement, and by profession of faith and baptism) and what does each mean? Explain*
2. *What is the most important requirement for being a member of a local church or joining a church? Why? Explain*
3. *Why should a genuine profession of faith in Christ be the primary requirement for church membership?*

The application of John's opening greeting is that being a part of a local church is not primarily a matter of...

- Not a matter of attending services
- Not a matter of joining the church (*as important as those things are*)
- It is a matter of coming into a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

2 Things It Means to be a Part of His Church:

- (1) To be a part of His church means that you have personally experienced His grace, mercy, and peace through His salvation – It means you have been saved through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ**
- (2) To be a part of His church means that you hold firmly to the truth about Jesus Christ - We will examine this one more in a moment**

Some things of note:

- At times I have encountered people who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, but they join or remain in a liberal church or more progressive churches that deny the need for the new birth, and the atoning work of Christ, or solid biblical truth, they teach things contrary to God's Words (watering down the Word of God)...
- They may do this "to have a ministry" there they say, or to make a difference there. Listen that rarely happens and more often than not they become more influenced by the false and shallow/compromised teaching of that church than they do influence and make a difference there. My counsel would for them to get out of there!
- Such churches may be a mission field, but they are not really churches at all, in the biblical sense of the word.
- But the point of missions is to get people out of their pagan religion and into healthy local churches where they can grow and serve.
- To evangelize people in a liberal church and then leave them there goes against the New Testament teaching on the nature and purpose of the local church.
- The church is a body of people who have a saving relationship with the Father through His Son because of His sovereign grace.

The life within the church centers on a personal relationship with the Father through the Son, based on His sovereign grace. But then John is always telling us that the life within the church is founded on the truth about Jesus Christ

THE LIFE WITHIN THE CHURCH IS FOUNDED ON THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

What people believe about Jesus just couldn't be more important, and for a number of reasons? Most importantly, because what we believe about Jesus will determine where we will spend eternity. Lifeway Christian Research actually recently released...

Despite many American Christians holding to very orthodox concepts regarding Jesus (His virgin birth, sinless life, His miracles, His resurrection, etc.) there are two misunderstandings about Jesus have taken root in both church and culture. These may seem like obvious lies to pastors, but many in the pews aren't quite as confident. *These two lies many Christians*

believe remind the church to frequently return to the basics of what we believe about Jesus Himself.

The Most Common Lies People Believe About Jesus:

- (1) **Lie 1: Jesus is not eternal** - To use just two examples, John 1 and Colossians 1 speak of Jesus existing before God created anything. As God the Son, He played an active role in the creation of the universe. Yet, not only do many Americans doubt this concept, many Christians share those doubts. In relation to Christmas itself, there's confusion about Jesus' eternality. **While 80% of Americans say Jesus is the Son of God the Father and 72% say the birth of Jesus is a historical fact, only 41% believe the Son of God existed before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.** Even among evangelicals, just 65% agree. The more frequently one attends church, the more likely they are to believe the Son of God existed prior to Jesus' birth. However, fewer than 2 in 3 (63%) of the most frequent churchgoers believe this. **Only 41% of Americans believe the Son of God existed before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Even among evangelicals, just 65% agree.** More than half of Americans (55%) say Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God, according to the. What's worse, evangelicals are more likely to agree (73%) and have been more likely to agree since the first State of Theology study in 2016. Some of the confusion among Christians may stem from seeing the phrase "first and greatest" and wanting to ascribe those characteristics to Jesus. It may be you could quickly show many what was wrong with that statement, but they won't always have someone there with them. When they engage in conversations with non-Christians, including those belonging to breakaway groups like Latter Day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses, they could easily miss the important distinctions of Christianity. That may be why 67% of Americans and 56% of evangelicals believe God accepts the worship of all religions. They can't explain what makes any of those religions unique, including their own.
- (2) **Lie #2: Jesus is not God** - Again, John 1 and numerous other biblical passages point to Jesus' divine nature, but most Americans and many Christians aren't quite sure. *The State of Theology study* found most evangelicals (97%) and even Americans as a whole (71%) accept the Trinity as a doctrine. They agree there is one true God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Just don't ask them to go much deeper than that. **More than half of Americans (53%) say Jesus was a great teacher but not God. More than 2 in 5 evangelicals (44%) agree.** One couldn't and shouldn't expect the average churchgoer to be able to explain the intricacies of the Trinity. If you believe God the Son is one person in the one true God, however, it shouldn't be too difficult of a step to affirm that Jesus is God. **More than half of Americans (53%) say Jesus was a great teacher but not God.** That's clearly contradictory to other beliefs but somewhat understandable for non-Christians. Unfortunately, even among Christians, there's confusion. More than 2 in 5 evangelicals (44%) agree that Jesus was a great teacher but not God. Fewer than half of Americans who attend religious services at least monthly (47%) outright say they disagree with the statement. For some, these two lies may be more misunderstandings than heresies. Still, the fact that these

beliefs are so widely held, even among Christians, demonstrates that churches must frequently return to the basics of what we believe about Jesus Himself.

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John is obviously concerned about the **“truth.”** He uses that word five times in the first four verses. For John, the concept of truth centers on the person of Jesus Christ. The heretics were deceiving people about the person of Christ (v. 7), saying...

- Either that He did not have a real human body
- Or that “the Christ” came upon the man Jesus at His baptism and left just prior to His crucifixion.
- These errors went against the person of Jesus that John had seen, heard, and touched (1 John 1:1-4).

Wrong views of the person of Christ invariably spill over into wrong views on His work on the cross. If you deny Jesus’ true humanity, then He could not be the substitute for the sins of humans. So it is essential to hold to sound doctrine on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

There are countless reasons to believe in Jesus. Many of us start on our journey of faith because we need something that Jesus can give us. We need help, hope, healing, or joy. Our lives are falling apart, and we want answers, solutions. But there’s one critical reason to believe in Jesus that underlies all others... **To bring us into right relationship with God!** Reconciliation with God is the remedy for all that’s wrong with us and the resolution for everything we need. Why did Jesus come to earth? Why did He die on the cross? He came and did all that He did to bring us into a relationship with God the Father: **“For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them”** (2 Corinthians 5:19, NLT). Mending our broken relationship with God is the primary point of Christian salvation. The Bible says that all of us have a problem—it’s called sin (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8). Because we are born into this world as sinners (Psalm 51:5), we are separated from God and on a path that leads to eternal destruction. But God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us. He wants to save us from destruction and give us everlasting life: “God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him” (1 John 4:9, NLT).

Why and What We Should Believe in Jesus Christ?

- (1) **Jesus' death on the cross paid the full price for our sin** - *"He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world"* (1 John 2:2). Jesus satisfied the debt we owed and took the punishment we deserved (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 1:18–19; 1 Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Romans 6:23). When Christ rose from the dead, He conquered death for us (Revelation 1:18; Hebrews 2:14; John 3:16). We don't have to die, because Christ died for us. The only way to be forgiven of sin and restored to God is to repent and believe in Jesus (Acts 2:38; 17:30; Mark 1:4; Luke 13:3). Jesus is the only way to the Father (1 Timothy 2:5). In John 14:6–7, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well."
- (2) **God longs to connect with us in an intimate friendship** - When we believe in Jesus, we become children of God, *"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"* (John 1:12, ESV). When we believe in Jesus, we receive access to God's holy presence to comfort, protect, lead, and guide us (Ephesians 2:13, 18; 3:11–12; Hebrews 4:16). He teaches us and speaks to us through His Word (Psalm 119:105) and enables us to live for Him by the power of His Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:10–13; John 14:26).
- (3) **When we believe in Jesus, we receive the greatest gift of all—the salvation of our soul** - (1 Peter 1:8–9) And this gift is free. We can't do anything to earn it. We don't deserve it, but He gives it to us anyway: "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it" (Ephesians 2:8–9, NLT).
- (4) **Believing in Jesus opens up our hearts to experience a love like no other** - The kind of love that is willing to sacrifice and die for us (John 10:11; Romans 5:8). God's love is the strongest and most profound love ever known, and nothing will ever separate us from it (Romans 8:35–39).
- (5) **Believing in Jesus and having a relationship with God frees us from our old life of guilt, shame, and sin** - (John 8:36; Romans 8:2) Only through Christ can we experience the satisfaction our souls long for: "For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things" (Psalm 107:9, ESV).
- (6) **When we enter into a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, we learn who we were created to be and the true purpose of our lives** - *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10, ESV; see also Philippians 3:8–10).

Christianity is not based on the religious speculations of philosophers, but rather upon the revelation of God in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. The apostles spent three years with Jesus and they bear witness in the New Testament to His life, teachings, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. They make it clear that He is God in human flesh. The church of Jesus Christ is, therefore, a community of those who (literally, v. 1) *"have*

come to know the truth.” In verse 2 John personifies truth with reference to Jesus Himself, who claimed to be the truth (John 14:6). John says the truth *“abides in us and will be with us forever.”*

Contrary to the current prevalent postmodern philosophy, the New Testament affirms that truth is both absolute and knowable. The truth centers in all that the Old and New Testaments affirm about Jesus Christ. To know Him personally is to be in the truth. This does not mean that you must become a theologian or be able to explain all of the biblical teaching about Christ and salvation in order to get saved. To be saved, you simply must recognize that you are a sinner in need of a Savior and that Jesus is that Savior. Trust in Him and He will save you.

But it does mean that as a believer, you should grow in your understanding of the truth about Jesus Christ and salvation. Sound doctrine on these matters is crucial. The main difference between the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who are not saved, and those who are truly saved, centers on the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ. When John talks about “some of your children *walking* in truth,” the word *walk* implies that truth is something that every believer must continually grow in over time.

So the first mark of a healthy church is that the members know God personally through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The second mark is that they walk in the truth about Christ.

THE LIFE WITHIN THE CHURCH EXPRESSES ITSELF IN LOVE

John is concerned about *both* truth and love. He uses *love* four times in these six verses. Truth and love cannot be separated. Liberals set aside truth and make love for everyone the basis of unity, no matter what they believe. On the other hand, some fighting Fundamentalists exalt the truth on even minor issues over love, and thus cause divisions among those who truly know and follow Jesus Christ.

What is the balance between truth and love?

How do we decide which truths must never be compromised, versus where we should be tolerant for the sake of unity?

Should we love those who deny essential truth about Christ and the gospel? If so how? See Jude 22-23. “²² And on some have compassion, making a distinction; ²³ but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.”

Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:14-15, *“¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.”*

Christians often talk about the need to “speak the truth in love,” a command found in Ephesians 4:15. Many times what they mean is the need to share difficult truths in a gentle, kind, inoffensive manner. From a practical standpoint, we know that difficult things are best heard when our defenses are not up. In a loving, non-threatening environment, hard truths are more readily received. So it is biblical to share hard truths with others “in love,” in the manner that the phrase is commonly used. Speaking the truth in love is not as much about having a gentle demeanor as it is about the way truth and love go hand-in-hand. Because we love one another, we must speak the truth. Because we know the truth, we must be people characterized by love (John 13:34–35; 15:1–17). Jesus “came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). As His followers who are being conformed to His image (Romans 8:29), we should also be characterized by grace and truth.

Importantly, we are also called to love those who do not know Christ. The best way we can show love is to share with them the truth of the gospel. Apart from Christ, people are dead in their sins and destined for an eternity in hell (John 3:16–18; Romans 6:23). But in Christ they can receive new life and eternal salvation (Romans 10:9–15; 2 Corinthians 5:17). This is a message we must share. Peter wrote, “In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). We share the gospel because we love the people for whom Christ died. We speak God’s truth because of His love and in a way that clearly and unapologetically communicates both truth and love (1 John 4:10–12).

3 Important Things to Remember About Truth and Love:

- (1) **It is not love to be untruthful** – It is not true love for another person to hide the truth, water down the truth, or to be deceptive about the truth. Here are some things that may sound hard and maybe even make people uncomfortable but to not be truthful about these things and hide these truths is very uncaring, very uncompassionate, is the opposite of love... what about the reality of hell and that those who don’t know Jesus or reject Jesus will go to hell... what about the calling sin “sin” and not sugar coating it... to not call sin that destroys the lives of others, that separates them from God, and places their life under judgement, what it is, is not only uncompassionate, it is extremely unloving and dangerous.
- (2) **Truth can be spoken in a loving and compassionate way** – There is a way to share “truth” in a way that communicates a level of care and concern... true love for the individual. Jesus was a master at this. Throughout the New Testament Jesus set the example with His words “go and sin no more” at speaking truth to a situation.
- (3) **True love sometimes has to speak hard truth** -

Truth on the essentials of the gospel must be the basis for fellowship and unity. If someone denies the essentials of the gospel, he is not a Christian and we have no basis for true fellowship. As we will see in verse 10, if someone is promoting false teaching, the loving thing to do is not to welcome him as a brother, but to separate from him as someone promoting evil. So our love for others must be discerning (Phil. 1:9).

If someone came to your door who was infected with a highly contagious disease, such as tuberculosis, you would not be acting in love to your family to welcome him to come in and stay with you. Since false doctrine about the person and work of Christ is a deadly, infectious disease, it is not loving to welcome those who are infected with this disease into our church or homes. We will look more at this next week. But, among those who truly know and love Jesus Christ in truth, we must be loving, especially when we disagree over minor issues.

THE LIFE WITHIN THE CHURCH IS MAINTAINED THROUGH OBEDIENCE

John has emphasized truth (5 times) and love (4 times). He also emphasizes obedience. The word *commandment* occurs 4 times in verses 4-6. As you know, these are the three tests of 1 John: authentic Christianity consists of believing the truth about Jesus Christ, loving one another, and obeying God's commandments.

John says (v. 6) that we are to "walk according to His commandments." These commandments involve the truth (v. 4) and love (vv. 5, 6). When John emphasizes that his readers had these commandments "from the beginning" (5, 6), he means that Jesus Christ gave us these commandments and that obeying them should be basic, first-level Christian teaching. The first thing a new believer should learn is that being a Christian means obeying Jesus as Lord. And, a key commandment of Jesus is that we love one another. As we've seen, biblical love is not primarily a feeling, but rather a matter of the will that can be commanded. It is a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that seeks the highest good of the one loved.

It is a tragedy that many evangelical churches are wracked with dissension because self-centered, power-driven people who profess to know Christ force their way on the church. We will see this illustrated in the case of Diotrephes, "who loves to be first among them" (3 John 9). This is usually done under some "pious" cause: "I'm defending the truth!" But invariably, it is not truth that is essential to the gospel. Power-driven people are motivated by pride or self-will. They need to be confronted with their disobedience to Christ's commandment of love.

CONCLUSION

While no church, denomination or congregation is perfect, the Bible does present characteristics to help us recognize a church that corresponds with God's standard and what

a healthy church looks like inwardly. That is some of what John is pointing us to in the first part this short letter to a New Testament church that was perhaps being threatened by false teaching...

5 Characteristics of an Inwardly Healthy Church:

- (1) **A healthy church teaches sound doctrine based on the whole counsel of God's Word (Titus 1:9; 2:1; 1 Timothy 6:3–4; 2 Timothy 2:2)** - When believers meet together, both for corporate worship and smaller Bible study (like Sunday School), the Bible ought to be the center of the teaching. Faithful interpretation and everyday application of sound biblical doctrine will produce wholesome Christian living (1 Timothy 1:10; 4:6; 2 Timothy 3:15–17). The centrality of scriptural truth preserves the well-being of the local church as well as its leadership (2 Timothy 1:13–14; Titus 1:6–9). And when biblical truth and sound doctrine are prioritized, safeguarded, and taught without compromise, then all other traits of a healthy church will naturally follow.
- (2) **A healthy church recognizes the biblical qualifications of spiritual leaders** - For example, godly leaders are not to be arrogant, quick-tempered, violent, greedy, or dishonest, but rather must be hospitable, wise, just, upright, disciplined, and devout (Titus 1:6–9; 1 Timothy 3:1–7). Healthy church don't put people in leadership position, or positions of some authority just to fill a spot, to get them more involved, or because they ask to be... these are all the wrong reason to fill a position. If someone isn't involved how smart is it to get them more involved by placing them in a position of influence, leadership or importance. If they aren't involved, that is most likely a sign of low commitment, and you may not know where they are spiritually if they aren't very involved. Also, leadership position or position of authority in a church should be filled only after much prayer and discernment. Nothing could be more dangerous and unhealthy for a church than the wrong people in the wrong positions. It is a principles that has been affirmant a hundred times over again.
- (3) **A healthy church will produce leaders after the example of Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22–23; 4:15; 5:23 Colossians 1:18)** - Jesus led through servanthood (Matthew 20:25–28; John 13:12–17). Jesus also spent most of His three years in ministry interacting closely with the twelve disciples, teaching and training them, and letting them observe His life. Good leaders identify and train other leaders (Acts 6:1–7). Biblical leaders are good stewards of the ministry and the resources that have been entrusted to them by God (1 Corinthians 4:1–3; 9:17; 1 Peter 4:10). While we shouldn't expect the overseers of a healthy church to be perfect, they ought to be servant leaders who participate in training disciples, equipping believers for ministry and helping other servants of God become mature and godly leaders (Ephesians 4:11–16).
- (4) **A healthy church emphasizes discipleship, which produces faithful followers who aren't perfect, but who know and love God (John 8:31–32; 14:15; 1 John 2:3–6)** - Discipleship includes getting involved in the life of the church, building authentic relationships with other believers (Acts 2:42–47; 1 Corinthians 10:17), exercising gifts

of ministry and service (Romans 12:4–8; 1 Corinthians 12:7), growing in sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3–4; 5:23), and bearing fruit (John 15:5–8).

(5) A healthy church does its part in obeying the Great Commission - (Matthew 28:19–20) of spreading the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was raised from death to life, and now reigns to offer forgiveness of sins, new life in the Spirit, and eternal life to all who repent and believe. Evangelism encompasses local outreach, world missions, and simply sharing the gospel with people in our everyday lives. As ambassadors for Christ on this earth, believers are called to be “the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life” (2 Corinthians 2:15–16).

Other marks of a healthy church can be observed in the early New Testament church of the book of Acts (Acts 2:42–47). The early church was devoted to biblical doctrine, meeting together for prayer, worship, and communion. These early Christians fervently dedicated themselves to one another, forming a loving, generous environment where members cared for one another. A healthy church today will exhibit similar enthusiasm for authentic Christian living and participate in the purposes and work of God’s kingdom on this earth.