

Dear Friends,

With John's two small letters, 2 John and 3 John, we are blessed to see a glimpse into John's personal relationships with other believers. He manifests as much care for them and their sound faithfulness as for the churches to whom he wrote. We live in a culture that has abandoned New Testament Christian ethics on both sides of New Testament truth. One bad idea regards anyone who dares to disagree with "Me" with hate and ungodly harshness. The opposite bad idea regards what it has identified as politically correct to be blind tolerance of any idea whatever. It wholly rejects the ethics of Jesus and the New Testament. In fact both ideas reject Jesus and His teaching and lifestyle. How did Jesus react to those who unjustly beat Him and crucified Him? "Father, forgive them," hardly reads like the unkind harshness that we hear in our day, does it? And both Jesus' confrontation of those who rejected His teaching, consistently followed by His inspired New Testament writers, also refutes the open-ended mindset that avoids labeling anything as truly wrong.

If we learn John's--and Jesus'--dominant theme and guide for our lifestyle, it is quite simple. We believe in eternal salvation all of God and His "Grace." What is this thing we call "Grace"? Forget the cliches, such as "God's riches at Christ's expense." The most basic idea is simple and straightforward. "Graciousness" is the idea of "Grace" in practice. Isn't that the point of believing in salvation all of God and His "Grace"? Isn't His decision to save a people for His name the ultimate act of undeserved and unearned "Graciousness" in Him? Yes indeed. If we then truly follow Jesus and His example, we must cultivate this same sense of graciousness toward others in our interactions and conduct toward them.

We have much to learn in the practice of "Gracious" New Testament ethics. Lord bless us to be good students in His "School of Grace."

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

2 John

Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. (2 John 1:8-11 KJV 1900)

In both Second and Third John, we shift from public and “General” epistles or letters to personal letters from John to individual believers. 2 John is addressed to a woman and her household, “*the elect lady and her children.*” (2 John 1:1 KJV) 3 John is addressed to “the wellbeloved Gaius.” Some commentaries suggest that John wrote 2 John to a church, perhaps the same readers to whom he wrote 1 John, perhaps another. They reason that John

used the symbolic “*elect lady and her children*” to protect the identity of his recipients in the event the letter fell into the hands of a persecuting adversary. The intended recipient is not significant to the message itself. John’s message was written to warn his readers of a present and dangerous error that false teachers were promoting at the time.

“*elect lady*” serves to describe John’s readers, literal or symbolic. They were people whom the Lord had chosen, elected, to be His children, blood bought heirs of His certain saving grace. This lady didn’t elect herself; she was elected by the Lord. Modern teaching that we control our election by our own actions contradicts this and every other New Testament lesson on election. As we read this brief letter, we would do well to recall Peter’s message in 2 Peter 2. New Testament believers should prepare to face false teachers, for their invasion of the godly faithful is predictable in each generation. The error may change, but the false teachers and their methods will remain the same, to distract believers from the Lord and His loving mercy.

What was the specific error that threatened John's original readers? John describes them.

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. (2 John 1:7 KJV 1900)

The error was the same as John warned his readers in 1 John, a form of gnosticism that rejected the truth of God coming to His people in a literal physical body. How does John describe those who taught this idea? “...**a deceiver and an antichrist.**” John consistently contradicts the populist teaching of our day that “Antichrist” will be one supernatural and evil adversary who will appear shortly before the Second Coming. In both 1 and 2 John, John identifies the term “Antichrist” with anyone who rejects the Incarnation, Jesus, the eternal Word of God, come in human flesh.

And the Word was made 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 1:14 KJV)

John records the inspired truth; anyone who denies this truth of Scripture is “*a deceiver and an antichrist.*” To further affirm this truth, study 1 John 2:18, “*...as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, **even now are there many antichrists....***” Some of the fiercest doctrinal “Battles” in the first five centuries after Jesus related to the nature of the Incarnation. I suspect this error in some form has challenged every generation of faithful believers.

Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. The Bible teaches that faithful believers in Jesus indeed receive a reward in and for their faithful service to Him and to His children. In fact, John hopes, by this letter, to ensure that both he and his first readers shall “*...receive a **full reward,***” not compromise their faith and lose it or receive less than the full measure. However, Bible students in a culture that is so focused on man and how much man must do to accomplish his

own salvation should emphasize the relevant question. **When** do faithful believers receive—or not receive—their rewards? Scripture teaches that our eternity with the Lord as His redeemed children is an inheritance, not a reward. It can't be both. So, if our rewards are not given to us in heaven, when do we receive them? I suggest that we receive them—or fail to receive them—in our present life.

Why the term “*reward*”? Think of this simple illustration. A family buys an abandoned puppy from the local animal pound. They know nothing of its pedigree or history. The pound can give them some sense of its likely breed or mix. How much is this puppy worth? Not much at all. In fact, if someone doesn't rescue it from the pound, it will soon face death. But the family gets it from the pound, takes it to a vet for puppy vaccines and a checkup, and takes it home. The young children in the family are thrilled at their new pet. Over time the little puppy becomes a beloved member of the family. They love it and take the best possible care of it. But one day someone leaves the yard gate open, and the puppy decides to explore

the big world outside its yard and home. When the children arrive home from school that day, they are dismayed that the puppy is nowhere to be found. Mom and Dad join them in searching the neighborhood, but no puppy. The next day they post a photo of the puppy throughout the neighborhood, listing their name and phone number for anyone who finds the puppy. The last line of the lost puppy poster reads, "Reward \$100." Is this puppy worth \$100? It has no pedigree and no inherent value. However, it is now beloved by the whole family. Because of the family's love for the little puppy, they are happy to pay that amount for the return of their beloved puppy. If a good neighbor happens to find the puppy and returns it to the family, how much did the return cost them? Nothing. They incurred no cost and only a minor inconvenience to return the puppy to its home. However, they gladly accept the reward. It is a reward because it is worth far more than the value of the puppy and equally worth far more than their effort to return it.

So it is with faithful believers. When we faithfully abide in the original message and

doctrine of the gospel, rejecting all subsequent corruptions of that doctrine by false teachers, we are merely doing what the Lord teaches us to do. However, He in tender grace, as a wise and loving Father, gives us a reward of far greater value than we earned or could imagine by our efforts at faithfulness. What a loving caring God we have! And these “Rewards” serve to encourage us in faithfulness to continue in the path of faith and the teaching of Jesus and His apostles in Scripture as long as we live.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. At first read, these thoughts seem rather severe. However, we find in this lesson one of John’s favorite words, a word he often used in his gospel. “**Hath**” in this verse was translated from the Greek root for our English word “Echo.” Let’s restate the verse using that word.

*Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, **echos** not God. He that*

*abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he **echos** both the Father and the Son.*

Echo defines how we use something we already possess, our voice. You don't create an echo to gain a voice. To "Echo" our Lord in our lives, we must faithfully follow His teaching and practice His lifestyle, serving and caring for others above self, and holding steadfastly to New Testament teaching of His words, His "Doctrine." This verse is not about who is saved and who is not, but about how saved people represent the Lord and His faith or fail to do so. How can we in our daily conduct ensure that we "echo" our Lord, rightly representing Him and His message by our own conduct, thoughts, words, and deeds? John gently and simply shows us how.

*I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, **that we love one***

another. And this is love, ***that we walk after his commandments.*** This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. (2 John 1:4-6 KJV 1900)

For Christians to “***love one another***” does not mean we maintain a mushy emotional attitude toward them. New Testament love is all about actions, not emotional feelings. Therefore, John further qualifies what it means for believers in Christ to “*Love one another.*” How do we love one another? We “***walk after his commandments,***” not our own ideas, opinions, and imaginations. To borrow the “Echo” idea, we abide in Jesus and His “Doctrine,” His teachings, not follow the false teachers who abound.

How should we deal with the inevitable false teachers who seek to deceive us with error cloaked in wrested interpretations of the Scriptures? John also answers this question, fully as much a part of faithfulness as abiding in (“Echoing”) the Lord’s example and commandments.

*If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, **receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:** for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*

Often in Scripture, as in other literary works, one's "House" is used to symbolize their very personal "Emotional and philosophical house," what they think and how they reason. Especially when responding to those who attempt to teach you another way, different doctrine or ideas regarding Jesus, the way of salvation, and God, our one Biblical response to entrenched false teaching is to keep them and their ideas out of our "House," our personal minds and thinking. Further John teaches that we are to avoid any action that implies wishing them well in their false teaching.

We need John's warning to insulate us from willing blindness to evil that prevails in our day and its indulgent thinking. Yes, love the Lord's people based on Jesus' love. Live your faith as a good example to them. But nudge

them to turn from their sins and follow the Jesus way of godly faith. If they knowingly remain committed to their sinful ways and ideas, be faithful and follow John's inspired warning. Keep them and their ideas out of your "House."

Elder Joe Holder