



Benefits of Being Inhospitable

◀ Series: John's Letters · 14 of 14

4/5/2020 (SUN) | Bible: 2 John

Last week we finished John's first letter. We looked at the final few verses in his first letter. And so this week we're on to his second letter. So we're on 2 John. This is a very short book. It is the second shortest book in the whole Bible, being only thirteen verses long. And so what I intend to do is to cover the letter in one go today.

There have been some questions down the centuries about the authorship of the letter. I am convinced, as are most believers throughout history, that this is clearly one of John's letters. Not only is it in his very distinct style, but also we have for example Irenaeus from the early church. Irenaeus testified that this was one of John's letters. How would he know? Well, Irenaeus was the bishop of Lyons and he was a friend of Polycarp. You may remember me saying some time ago that Polycarp was a personal friend of the apostle John. So Irenaeus would have been able to listen as Polycarp relayed stories of his time with the apostle himself.

When I said there was a similar style, well, there are some major points from his first letter which appear here in much condensed form. We have:

- the necessity of **loving God**
- the necessity of **loving others**, especially the church
- the necessity of **obeying God**, and
- the necessity of **guarding the truth**

This letter can be broken down into three sections. We have a greeting to open with, we have the main section and then we have the farewell. The main section itself we shall consider in two parts: one about love and one about truth, unsurprisingly. So let's begin with the first three verses of this greeting.

The greeting it says is from the "Elder". You may think this is an unusual way for the apostle to describe himself, but it is not so unusual. In fact Peter uses the very same title of himself. If you look in 1 Peter, chapter 5 and verse 1, Peter says "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder." Peter says, "I'm an elder too".

Who's it addressed to then? It's addressed to the "elect lady" and her children. It's been seen as a rather unusual term by Bible students. Well as I see it there are two possibilities for what the elect lady means: it refers either to an individual or a local church. And to be honest, I haven't been able to ascertain which one I think is the correct one. I'm sitting well and truly on the fence on this.

Arguments in favour of this being an individual? Well, it accords with our first impression. If you read it, you're more likely to conclude it's an individual being addressed. Where it's been translated "lady", the Greek word is *Kuriá*. This has given rise to the name "Kyria" and others. So it's possible that that it would have been better translated as "to the elect Kuria" if indeed it was an individual.

The next letter of John's—in 3 John—is addressed to a person, so we might expect this one to also be addressed to an individual, because there John addresses Gaius by name.

Arguments in favour of this being a local church? Well in the scriptures the church is often called in these female terms: “woman”, “virgin”, “bride” etc. People who support the idea would ask why he doesn't use a name. In his next letter, he used the name Gaius. Why does he not use a name here?

So I would say the language as we see it in front of us allows for both, and I submit to you that it is mostly irrelevant. Whether aimed at an individual and her believing family or an entire local church, the principles remain the same, and we apply them to ourselves in exactly the same way. So we'll just move on.

This opening greeting ends in verse 3 with a very full title for Jesus: “the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father”.

- In terms of his rulership, it tells us *he* is Lord
- In terms of redemption, *he* is “Jesus”, that is saviour
- In terms of prophecy, *he* is Christ, the Messiah
- And in terms of divinity, *he* is the very Son of God—that is, God the son

Let's have a look at the first part of the body of this letter versus 4 to 6 then. It tells us straight away that we are commanded to walk in truth. *Commanded* to walk in truth. Now that would suggest, do you agree, that to not walk in truth is disobedience? In other words, **unbelief is sin**. Let me remind you what it says in John 3:18. John reports Jesus as saying, “He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten son of God.”

Why would God hold people accountable for not believing in him? Some might say, “I don't believe. I don't have anything against the idea of a God/the god. I simply don't believe.” The Bible answers that. There is an awareness of God in all men who are made in the image of God, deep down, in each one of us—in some, deeper than others. There is an awareness of the existence of God, even if the individuals don't understand what God is like. Still, there's this awareness, and the majority of the world's population throughout all of history, even up to today in the modern age, believe in a god. Most believe in an almighty God who made the world. And so what type of extreme hardening must be taking place in those who profess themselves to be atheists!

We have a commandment then about love, and you will remember that I said that love is not some involuntary emotion. It's more than that. It's **obedient service**. Obedient service. Let me just reiterate what I said about the thrust of John's arguments:

1. From the dawn of time, the command has been to “**Love God**”. Love God with your whole heart.
2. *How* do we love him? We **obey** him.
3. What does he want us *to* obey? His **commandments**.
4. What *are* his commandments? Well, we know that there are three:
 - a. Love **God**
 - b. Love **his children**
 - c. Love **all the other people!**

There is a priority there. Regarding this love, I wondered whether some people think like this: they start with God and think, *We need to love God 100%*. And then the church. Well, we have to maybe drop the love down a level for the church. We can't love the church as much as God. So our

obligations are a little bit less for the church. And then for the general population, our unsaved friends and neighbours and family, we drop it down another level. We love them a little bit less.

That is not the way we're supposed to think about love. Let me start you at the bottom and work upwards. What should our love be to the general population? I'll tell you what one believer thought his obligation was. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans, chapter 9 and verse 3 says, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Let me be crystal clear. **Paul, in full knowledge that there was such a thing as an eternal place of torment, said that he would gladly go there for all eternity if it meant that his [unbelieving] countrymen could be saved!** Can you honestly match that in your love for your fellow countryman, your fellow humans?

You know, we're surrounded by people who just infuriate us, you know? We're surrounded by people who offend us. Criminals. We have drug dealers and rapists and killers. Surely Paul meant to exclude them. No. It doesn't say that. It sounds to me like he just had a general affinity for his countrymen. Whatever their condition of being unsaved, whether respectable or whether downright criminal, he was prepared to trade places with them. That, my friends, is our starting point. That's the level of love that we're starting at in our love for the world.

So let's try and increase that, shall we, to the next level? Let's try and increase that for the **brethren**. We have to now find a way of loving the brethren. How can we possibly increase that? Well we must!

And then at that point we'd say *Right: it's impossible to go any further*. And at that point, we have **God**. We're to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and body—if you like, AN INFINITE LOVE FOR GOD IS WHAT OUR AIM IS, AND YOU HAVE TO AIM AS IF YOU CAN REACH IT. Those are the levels of love that God wants us to show to others, to his children and to him.

We'll look at the next part of that middle section, verses 7 to 10. It mentions deceivers. Deceivers have gone out. And also it uses the word "antichrist". I want to remind you that we said many weeks ago that the term "the antichrist" was only found in John's letters and it was never about an individual. So I caution you that if you wish to choose some individual that may appear in the future, or you want to pick some particularly evil religious leader or succession of leaders in history, and say they are "The Antichrist", you need to know that you are going beyond what John meant. The Antichrist is a spirit of deception. It's the *spirit of antichrist* and it's adopted by many people. Therefore. There are many antichrists, not one.

Note that these evangelists who are antichrist in spirit that go around propagating their error fully believe that they are doing God's work. You just think about the zeal of some of these cults, like the Russellites, or "Jehovah's Witnesses". They've always worked very hard in their evangelism. But we remember that their zeal is not according to knowledge. And every time they go out and distribute the literature or speak to a person they are further angering God.

Verse 8 says about rewards. We should be careful to guard ourselves so that we don't lose those things we have worked for—so that we receive a full reward. It's used as an encouragement. We're told to work and get a reward. How loving is God! I said this last time: God rewards us as if we did it. But just to make sure we know what's going on, he says in the scriptures clearly that he's behind the whole process anyway. So even in all those actions that bring these wonderful results, like the salvation of souls or our eternal reward, were reminded that it's **all of him**. He gives us the will and the ability to perform the very works that he then rewards us for.

It says a “full reward”. Now this is either present reward or eternal. There are present rewards, you would agree, yes? In Job 36 and verse 11 for example it says, “...if they obey and serve him they shall spend their days in prosperity and their years in pleasures.” For us, what does that mean? **The prosperity of living the gospel life.** Pleasures at the right hand of God are for us *now*, not just in the future. So it could be present rewards that is meant in John's letter or he could mean eternal life. They are certainly both rewards of a different kind.

If you look in verse 9, it says about people transgressing. The transgression here is to deny the incarnation. If you deny the incarnation, you're not of God. But the word caught my attention because of a conversation I had during our family bible study several days ago. One of my daughters asked what “transgression” meant. And I thought it was enough to say it means *sin*, and that there were different words used for sin. They describe sin as either falling short of a target, missing the target or trespassing in places you shouldn't be. I thought I would mention it today because it's in our text. Specifically, then, transgression is the one that means there's a sort of line that we're not supposed to go past. *And we run over it.* And so it's about running ahead. It's like a child in the street with its parents and the child runs ahead. It could be dangerous. They could run into the road or something else.

There's another type of running ahead which is *running from traditional biblical values.* And this is more like what John meant. Traditional values. Those traditional doctrines that are soundly based on scripture. People want to run away from them—break away and do things their own way. You take for example the LGBTQ-plus-plus-minus lobby: they call what they are campaigning for “progressive”. “We are *progressive*” sounds good. It sounds like they're leaving behind superstition and moving on as part of some enlightened elite.

Well John meant here that people should “Stick with us...stick with what we've taught you. Don't run off into dangerous territory. You'll end up making shipwreck of your faith.” So in the world today we have progressives; and really progressive really means going backwards morally, to ancient sins. And the enlightenment of the modern-day, the enlightenment of modern thought, is simply a going further into darkness, not light. How the world just turns everything upside down!

Verses 10 and 11. We have here a well-known injunction from John. He says if you have people who, say, come to your home and espouse these doctrines, you should turn them away and not even say “Goodbye”, or “Have a nice day”. And why a small number of Christians have tried to deny that this is meant for us to take any notice of is because Christianity is by definition *hospitable*. I'll give you an example out of the scriptures, in the Gospel According to Luke and Chapter 14 verse 12. It says, “then said he also to him that bade him:”—this is Jesus speaking—“when thou makest a dinner or supper, call not thy friends or thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbours, lest they also bid thee again and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee. For thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.”

We're supposed to be hospitable. I was reminded of Jesus' approach. We often see Jesus being very warm-hearted. Then you turn the page and he's calling people names. The contrast is severe. He has a different approach to the general population than to the false teachers. He has two different approaches. He has warmth and then hostility. And in the same way we have different attitudes depending on the situation.

Who's included, do we think, in John's list? Who are those that deny the incarnation today? Well some examples:

- Atheists
- Russelites (JWs)
- Muslims
- Unitarians
- Jews
- Satanists
- Gnostics
- Christadelphians
- Mormons

They all fit John's description of the spirit of antichrist because they all deny this: **God was manifest in the flesh.**

What should our attitude be then? To those people in their role as teachers of those errors, we despise them and shun them. But as deceived people in darkness, we love them. So there seems to be a contradiction. How can we get that balance? I'll give you a practical example that might help.

A JW knocks at your door. Typically, if you try to engage them in a conversation, as soon as they know that you know anything about the scriptures they will run a mile. You'd think they'd be glad to meet someone who believed in God, believe Jesus died on a cross and believe in the Bible. But no: they will run. But if you can say anything, tell them "If you're not listening to what I've got to say about the gospel, you can just go. Don't come back. Just go." No need to slam the door in the face or, you know, kick them off the porch. Just "Off you go!"

What if it's someone from the local Unitarian Church visiting our little congregation? If he started trying to teach and convert people, I'd tell him to leave—tell him he's not welcome back.

But if those same people get in touch with me afterwards and said they'd like to speak about some things, and they're not coming with their JW head on, as evangelists. They just want to ask you some questions. Now there you have a human being in darkness who needs to be shown the light of Jesus Christ in the gospel. And so I would gladly have them in my house. I would show them hospitality. I would welcome them and give them the gospel.

If we look in Matthew 23, we can see an example of how Jesus dealt with the two different types of people that I've just described. The first reading's from Matthew 23 and verse 27. Jesus lays into these people and says. "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like unto whited sepulchres which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so, ye also outwardly appear righteous unto man but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. You serpents! You generation of vipers! How can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Is that strong enough for you? Let me remind you as a comparison of how he dealt with Nicodemus. Nicodemus comes not as an antagonist, not with a band of people trying to make fun of Jesus or trick him. He comes to Jesus at night. He has sincere questions. He doesn't understand most of what Jesus says to him, but he comes with that humility, and Christ receives him and sits down with him and speaks to him. A different approach.

I wonder: why did John advise us to shun people in this way? I'll give you three reasons—the benefits of telling someone to get away from your house or leave the church.

- Firstly **there's a witness to them.** There's a witness to the individual themselves. They've encountered someone who professes to have Jesus as their saviour, a person who is sincere. That sincere testimony says "I'm so interested in the truth that I'm not even going to speak

to you because you're not here to listen. You're here to try to win some new recruits." And that attitude can raise questions in their minds when they go away.

- The second benefit of shunning such people is **a witness to others**, for example in the street. Your neighbours might see this happen, and visitors to New Road might see what's going on, and they say, *Hang on...I know these people, and I know that man. He's friendly. How come he's suddenly changed? How come he's telling these people they're not welcome? He seems to be very jealous for truth. He seems to be more interested in truth than making friends.* It gets them thinking.
- So there's a witness to the individual and witness to the onlookers. And then also there is **discouragement**. The benefit of shunning such people is that we can cause discouragement. We want them to be discouraged. We want them to feel dejected. We want them to feel like they've wasted their entire day. We want them to feel like God is not with them.

And by the way, I would encourage you to pray along those lines. Regarding any who will lead others astray with false doctrines, I would say go ahead and pray that their plans would fail. That there would be arguments amongst them. That there would be divisions and schisms. And when if some dejected, disillusioned, former promoter of error comes to you searching, you will embrace them; and you will show hospitality to them; and you'll witness to them about the lovely Lord Jesus Christ.

John does not give us a warrant to extend this principle of shunning people. But can we? John describes one particular error. Can we extend it in any way to our own day? Well, we already do this in other ways. We go and give tracts out and preach on the internet, but there's no biblical permission for doing that. Someone might argue the apostles only spoke in the open air, so we shouldn't use anything printed or anything on the internet. What I believe is a more sensible position is to say that the point was *communication*. And while there's a place for open-air preaching, there is also a place for using other channels of communication that we have that they did not have; and so that's how we reason out that these are legitimate extensions of what was originally found in the Bible. They are fair equivalents. But what I'm getting at is, *Can we extend John's principle to people who promote error that is not of the type that John warned of?* Some of the people or organizations with the most religious error in this world don't have the error that John spoke of. What do we do with them?

Rome doesn't deny the incarnation. The Church of Rome would defend the incarnation to the hilt. But then they go and call Mary, who was a sinner, a mediator between God and men. It doesn't get much more serious than that, does it? There are Pentecostals who for the most part don't deny the incarnation, but then they support the rebuilding of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem so that the sacrifices can be initiated again, because they figure that God will be pleased with those things. We also have Wesleyans. They would not deny the incarnation. They would not fit John's description, and yet they say that Jesus died on a cross to cancel sin for people who he then lost. In other words, Jesus was punished for their sins *and* they get punished for all eternity for the same sins. It makes God unjust.

Three examples of people who don't fit John's description. Should we turn them away? If a Romanist comes to my front door and I say, "Well you don't fit the description of antichrist according to John's definitions, so come on in!" Here's what I believe. I believe we *can* apply John's injunction to some modern-day apostles of error—**but with great caution**. And how to decide and put lines down between serious error and inconsequential error is just not possible. There is no black and white answer. It's the same type of question as is raised when we ask who we should fellowship with. We're not fellowshiping with the Church of Rome down the road. What about the local charismatic

church? No. Well, what about the local Baptist Church that's a bit wishy-washy? Hmm...not sure about that. You see there's a whole spectrum of error and truth. It's very difficult to make these decisions. All I can say is each individual and each church must make the best judgment that they can.

We come to our final greeting in the letter—verses 12 and 13. He makes the point that this is nice writing to them. It is nice, isn't it? It's nice to write. Occasionally I'll get myself a scripture card and write a little message to someone and put it in the post. And in these days of email and social media, it's a nice surprise.

But John makes the point that face-to-face fellowship is far better. I was reminded of Moses. It says in Deuteronomy 34 and verse 10, "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." Face to face. Now Moses did not get to see God's "face"—if there *is* such a thing as God's face—when it said he spoke face-to-face. It means *clearly*. God had a relationship with him that was above and beyond the usual; but it wasn't visual.

We see in the same sense, *now*. We see face-to-face now in that we live in the clarity of the Gospel that we've received. And of course we get to see Jesus Christ in the flesh in the world to come. Face-to-face in a very literal way.

And so we come to the end of our letter, and I leave you with the hope that the very grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, that John wished for his friends, might be yours in the days ahead.

The Lord bless you mightily.

Amen.