

LOVE AND TRUTH
(SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2019)

Scripture: Numbers 6:22-27; 2 John 1-3

INTRODUCTION

We know that a good part of the NT consists of letters written by Paul, Peter, and John to churches and individuals. These letters are almost 2000 years old. Why do we still study them?

We study them because although many things have changed in this time, man's root problem of sin and rebellion against a holy God has not changed.

All men at all times need salvation and a Savior. These ancient letters set forth the solution and the grace of God. We also study these letters because they are not just interesting words from a man to others, but they are God's words ultimately. We read and study because this is God's truth. Through the Spirit, these letters were written. They have been preserved.

Through God's working these letters are part of the canon of Scripture.

In the introductory sermon on 1 John, I spoke briefly about John's role in the canonization of the NT. I am not going to review all of this material again, but listen to Rev. 22:18-19.

Rev. 22:18 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; **19** and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.

John MacArthur writes very well that these words of warning apply not just to the book of Revelation but that they also represent the close of the NT canon.¹

God did not just leave it up to fallible men to make the call on what is Scripture.

¹ MacArthur Study Bible, s.v. Rev. 22:18-19.

Now it is true that fallible men make up churches and today copy and spread God's Word. Individual Christians, local churches, and denominations have an awesome duty in submitting to God's truth and spreading God's truth. But thankfully we have assurance that truth does not just depend upon us. There is a standard.

To review:

- 1) The Apostles were directed by God to put together the canon of the NT, which completed the entire canon of Scripture.
- 2) The early church over time came to recognize this work.
- 3) The church does not create Scripture. It has been given the duty of teaching and living the truth of Scripture.

As we begin our study of 2 John, we consider some of the fundamental and most precious things that we believe. We need God's love and saving grace. We need His truth. And God has provided in abundance for us.

All that you need, God has and will provide.

We will first look at a few more points of background to 2 John and then focus on verses 1-3 and the themes of love and truth.

1) BACKGROUND TO 2 JOHN

Have you ever heard a sermon on 2 John? Because it is such a short book, the answer is probably no. 2 and 3 John are the two shortest books in the NT.

Why are they so short? Well, for one reason, John states that he planned to speak face to face with those he was writing.

Look at 2 John 12. Look also at 3 John 13-14a.

These short letters were not meant to say all that John wanted to share. However, even though they are so short, they are still precious. They are part of the record of Scripture. Notice also that these two letters actually have the style of the letters that we see through the NT. There is an author and a specific audience.

What did we see in 1 John? 1 John does not begin with this same style of introduction. We don't know all the reasons for this, but one good suggestion is that 1 John had a broader audience and initially a wider distribution. Another good suggestion is that these three letters were all carried together after they were first written.

One thing to observe is John's name is not directly used in 1, 2, or 3 John. In 2 and 3 John, the author is identified as the Elder. Why didn't John use his name? Two possible reasons.

First, the title Elder very well would have identified John to his readers.

Second, some suggest that in a time of danger and persecution, John's identity was hidden.

There are details we don't know.

As we studied 1 John, we noted many times how John's language connects with the Gospel of John. And we see that the theological ideas of 1 John are found in 2 John. 2 John and 3 John also have strong points connecting them.

So, as we look at these books from a literary and theological perspective, we can see much that identifies that these books all have the same author.

Using these details in conjunction with church tradition, we have no problem concluding that the Apostle John is the human author of these books.

Another thing to consider in terms of background is how the gospel was spread by apostles and other missionaries. Where would missionaries stay as they made their way into different cities?

One commentator notes the following:

'The comforts of the modern hotel, or even of the village inn, were then unknown' (Findlay). Besides, according to W. M. Ramsay, 'the ancient inns ... were little removed from houses of ill-fame ... The profession of innkeeper was dishonourable,

and their infamous character is often noted in Roman laws.' 'Inns were notoriously dirty and flea-infested', while 'innkeepers were notoriously rapacious' (Barclay). As a result, it was natural that Christian people on their travels should be given hospitality by members of local churches.²

Hospitality is an issue connected with 2 and 3 John. However, related to this is the importance of discretion.

Again, listen to the words of one commentator:

Such hospitality was open to easy abuse, however. There was the false teacher, on the one hand, who yet posed as a Christian: should hospitality be extended to him? And there was the more obvious mountebank, the false prophet with false credentials, who was motivated less by creed than by greed, namely the material profit and free board and lodging he hoped to receive.³

One of the early Christian writings that has been discovered is a work called the Didache.

And this work also sets forth the necessity of examining those who were looking for hospitality similar to what we see in 2 and 3 John.

There is still application, of course, today even though we live in a much different age, where there are plenty of places for people to stay. The fundamental issues of truth and love do not change.

Let's now focus on verses 1-3.

2) TRUTH AND GRACE, 2 JOHN 1-3

2John 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:

² John R. W. Stott, *The Letter of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 19; IVP/ Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 199-200.

³ *Ibid.*, 200.

2John 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.

John does not use his name, but he does use an important title, the Elder.

The term **elder** comes from the history of Israel. Many of the uses of this word speak to the political-religious leadership of Israel during the time of the NT.

But this word also became used for those who were part of local churches.

Acts 14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

The Apostle Peter also uses this word to describe himself in 1 Peter 5:1.

1Pet. 5:1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder [συμπρεσβύτερος] and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

The more challenging part of verse 1 is understanding who is this elect lady?

The Greek words are: ἐκλεκτῇ κυρία

The two main positions are these words refer to an individual woman or that they refer to a local church.

MacArthur for example states:

“The more natural understanding in context, however, is that it refers to a particular woman and her children (i.e., offspring) who were well-known to John.”⁴

On the other hand, another commentator writes:

“The phrase is, however, more likely to be a personification than a person – not the church at large but some local church over which the elder’s jurisdiction was recognized, *her children* (1, cf. 4, 13) being the church’s individual members.”⁵

⁴ MacArthur Study Bible, s.v. 2 John 1.

⁵ Stott, 203.

However, the difference might not be that significant.

Why? Because local churches would meet in homes and in some cases, it was the home of a prominent woman.

Can you think of an example?

Acts 16 records the account of Paul in the city of Philippi and the conversion of Lydia.

What do we read at the end of Acts 16?

40 So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of* Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

This elect lady could be the one who hosted the church, or it could be simply a reference to a local church that John knew personally.

There are good arguments for both positions.

Of interest is the word *kuria*, lady, which in Latin word is the word *Curia*, which refers to the papal court at the Vatican. Sometimes you will hear the term the Roman Curia.

Though the NT does specify that elders must be men, nothing in the NT indicates that women somehow are not vital to the life and work of local churches.

Going back to Philippi, Paul writes in Phil. 4:

Phil. 4:2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.
3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names *are* in the Book of Life.

Moving beyond some of these questions let us focus on the beautiful words of introduction.

You see from the beginning the two key words that open this letter: **love and truth**.

The word truth is used 5 times in 2 John all in the opening 4 verses.

The word love is used just two times, verses 1 and 5.

Notice that in verse 1: **love in truth**.

Verse 3 ends with **in truth and love**.⁶

The Gospel of John uses the word truth more than any other book, 25 times out of 110 times total.

Based especially on John's gospel, Robert Yarbrough shares five points about truth.

It is such a rich and important word.

- (1) Truth is possessed and imparted by the Holy Spirit who is truth.
- (2) Truth refers to the ethical standards that God has established for his people as expressed in his commandments.
- (3) Truth is God's revealed and personal sanctifying presence that gives the believer the capacity to reflect God's character traits, like love and aversion to sin.
- (4) Truth refers to the quality of conforming to the way things are in God's omniscient wisdom.
- (5) Truth refers to the gospel of Jesus Christ, its implications and the sphere of eternal life into which the gospel ushers those who embrace it.⁷

In verse 1 John says that he is not alone in expressing his love for the elect lady and her children.

According to God's grace and sovereign power there are others who know the truth.

Very often you hear people say, well, the only reason you are a Christian is that you are just following what your parents believed.

No doubt there are many who say that they are Christians simply because of tradition and culture.

⁶ Yarbrough, 334.

⁷ Yarbrough, 335-336.

There are many who go through the motions. They are playing games.

Now it is a great blessing to grow up in a Christian family where God's truth is proclaimed.

But those who know the truth must declare, this is not simply because I grew up in a Christian family, but God has brought the truth to me and me to the truth.

For here we are speaking of the intersection of God's sovereign power, His Word, and human hearts.

Let's turn to verse 2.

John says that he loves in truth for two reasons:

1) the truth which abides in us

2) and will be with us forever

In our study of 1 John, we saw that the verb **abide** was a key verb as it also is in John's gospel.

Truth is objective. It doesn't depend on man.

However, what John is saying is very important.

Truth here also speaks of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

John 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever — **17** the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells [abides] with you and will be in you.

Paul in Col. 3:16 commanded:

Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

So, to summarize:

(1) Truth is objectively revealed in God's Word

(2) We need the ministry of the Holy Spirit so that God's truth truly abides in us.

(3) We need to continue to seek God's truth so that we will love as we should love and not just according to human feeling or emotion.

Finally, let us consider verse 3.

As you carefully study the language of these opening verses you see that John writes in a way that is both similar to other parts of the NT and also unique.

He uses expressions and combinations of words not found anywhere else even though some of the words are very common.

For example, grace is not surprisingly a very common word, especially in Paul's writings.

But I believe this is the only place in the NT where you find **grace, mercy, and peace**.

And interestingly the three words grace, mercy, and peace are not found in 1 John.

And notice here also the language. John says grace, mercy, and peace **will be with you**.

This is not so much a wish or blessing as you would find in Paul's writings, for example, but a **promise**.

At the beginning of the message I emphasized the central point of these verses: **All that you need, God has and will provide**.

You need God's truth. He has provided that.

You desperately need God's grace, mercy, and peace.

And the Father will provide this through His Son and through the working of the Holy Spirit according to His abundant love.

These words are familiar, they are a wonderful summary of the entire plan of redemption, and yet they each flesh out what God has done and continues to do for us.

Grace: the undeserved love of God that He chooses to show to whom He will.

Mercy: very similar in meaning but it also includes the idea of God's faithfulness to what He has promised and forgiveness of our sin and rebellion.

Peace: the ultimate peace that God gives is peace with Himself. This blessing also includes the restoration and well-being that He brings.⁸

And we see that this grace, mercy, and peace are the work of the Triune God.

It is from the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of the Father.

What about the Spirit?

We have already seen how the Spirit's work is connected with the references to truth.

Yarbrough wisely observes: John is Trinitarian but not pedantically so, particularly when the Spirit's task is to point to the Son and Father.⁹

Since God has loved you, you know that His grace, mercy, and peace will be with you.

And how do you know God's love?

You know His love in Jesus Christ. You know His love as you read and rejoice in His Word.

You know His love because He has changed your heart so that instead of hating God you now seek to love and obey Him.

CONCLUSION:

All that you need, God has and will provide.

- The essential unity of truth and love.
- The incredible abundance that God does give.
- The call of the gospel to dead sinners

⁸ Smalley, 321.

⁹ Yarbrough, 336.

Prayer

Hymn 480

BENEDICTION: 2 COR. 13:11, 14

Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen..