

2 John: God of the Heart

Memory Verse: 2 John 1:5-6 "And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love."

Background

Second John is the 63rd book of the Bible, the 24th and shortest book in the New Testament with only thirteen verses. Identifying himself only as "The elder" (1:1), the apostle John is the accepted author of this letter. John addressed this letter to "the chosen lady and her children" (1:2). This phrase could refer to an actual woman and her family, possibly even a woman in whose home a church met. This phrase could also be speaking metaphorically of a church and its congregation. In either case, the value of the letter remains unchanged. It is believed that John wrote this letter soon after he wrote First John around 90 AD. He likely wrote this letter from Ephesus, where John may have functioned as an elder in the church there, or from the island of Patmos during his exile.

The Short Story

Christians are to love others within the limits that Truth allows.

What's the Big Idea?

In this short, intimate letter, John emphasizes the value of walking in truth and love. John professes his "love in truth" for the recipients of this letter, a love he shared with "all who know the truth" (1:1). This truth dwells in believers and is accompanied by grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ (1:2-3). John found great joy in those who were "walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us" (1:5). The truth of which John wrote was the truth of the gospel and the revealed Word of God found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' " (John 14:6). Based on this truth "which lives in us and will be with us forever" (1:2), John calls his readers once again to "love one another" (1:5). John defines this love as walking in obedience to the commands of Christ (1:6). This echoes the teaching of Jesus in John's gospel, where Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Jesus' greatest commandments were also those of love—to love God and to love your neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). However, John goes on to put limits on Christian love. He warns against the false teachers who were deceiving people with their proclamations that Jesus had not come in the flesh (1:7). John instructs his readers not to have anything to do with these antichrists lest they share in their "wicked work" (1:11). They were not even to offer them a greeting or welcome them into their homes (1:10). Christians are called to be people of love. However, that love should be discerning and limited when dealing with enemies of the Truth.

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

Living in a society that cries out for "tolerance" one might think that truth and love can not coexist. God calls His people to His Truth and to love. "...As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34). The love that Jesus calls us to is a love that rejoices with the truth (1 Cor. 13:6), stands firm in the truth, and doesn't compromise God's standards. Real love is sharing the truth with others with gentleness and respect so that it might lead us and those we love closer to Christ (Ephesians 4:15). Love and truth must exist in balance. "Our love is not to be so blind as to ignore the views and conduct of others. Truth should make our love discriminating...On the other hand, we must never champion the truth in a harsh or bitter spirit...So the Christian fellowship should be marked equally by love and truth, and we are to avoid the dangerous tendency to the extremism, pursuing either at the expense of the other. Our love grows soft if it is not strengthened by truth, and our truth grows hard if it is not softened by love. We need to live according to Scripture which commands us both to love each other in the truth and to hold the truth in love." (~John R. W. Stott). When we walk in truth and love, we can be assured of the blessings of "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son" (1:3).

**Material taken from various sources.*

Teaching Text

2 John 5-6: I am writing to remind you, dear friends, that we should love one another. This is not a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning. Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning.

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- What great command does John remind readers of?
- Where else have you seen this command in scripture?
- Why is it so essential and inextricable from a genuine Christian life?
- List some of the many specific ways God demonstrated His love for us through Jesus Christ.
- Pause to give Him thanks for all that He's done.

Practical Application

- How has God's love for you changed the way you love others?
- Where do you find it most difficult to love others?
- What do you need from the Lord to unconditionally love the difficult people in your life?
- Are you willing to seek Him for that?
- How did your imperfect parents best reflect God's perfect love?

Hitting the Highpoints

- 2 John 7-8 "I say this because many deceivers have gone out into the world. They deny that Jesus Christ came in a real body"
- 2 John 10-11 "If anyone comes to your meeting and does not teach the truth about Christ, don't invite that person into your home or give any kind of encouragement ..."

Bonus Features

"But that reality is not simply a static and objective entity or set of beliefs. We tend to think of truth as a number of abstract propositions that we are to comprehend and believe. But for the Elder, truth is a vital force that can be personified as living in us and being with us. Because it comes from the living God, truth is a dynamic power that abides with believers, enabling them to know what is true. And because truth comes from God, it exists forever and remains with the faithful, just as God exists eternally and remains in relationship with the faithful. If we could capture John's view of truth as a force that, because it is the work of God's own Spirit, shapes and empowers us, we might be less prone to think of truth as something that depends upon us to preserve it. In reality, we depend upon the truth to guard us --and not vice versa--because we depend upon God. Only as the truth abides in us do we abide in the truth. But we are somewhat too quick to reverse that relationship, and put human beings in the place where God's activity and power belong." *Excerpted from IVP Commentary on Biblegateway.com*

Personal Takeaways and Notes