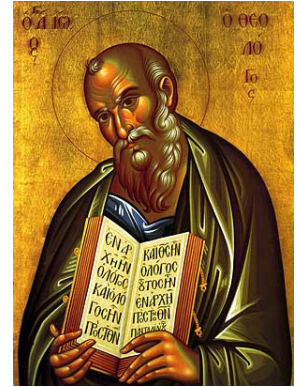


2 and 3 John

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2 John

Author John, one of Jesus' disciples and a leader of the early Church.

Written to *"The chosen lady and her children"*. v1. We don't know who the chosen lady was or why she was chosen. She must have been someone special, though, because she

- was loved by John. v1,2.
- had children who walked in the truth. v4.
- was a good friend to John. v12.

It is remarkable that 2 John was written to a woman, because in the culture of the time women were isolated and discriminated against.

Date Around 90AD when John was quite elderly.

Place Probably written in Ephesus.

Type Letter to a friend. Probably not intended for public reading.

Theme Walking in the truth. 2 John is the shortest book in the Bible – just 13 verses – but it contains a significant message for us today, especially as Christians struggle with being relevant. Truth is not a concept that is easily defined in our pluralistic world, so John's message to walk in the truth is very timely.

Purposes

- to encourage Christians to walk in the truth.
- to warn about prevailing Gnostic philosophies.
- to encourage the early Christians to continue in the teachings of Christ.

Key verses

It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth. v4.

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. v6.

Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. v9.

Outline

Greetings v1–3

John greets the chosen lady and her children who he loves *in the truth*. His love is *because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us for ever*.

Commendation v4

It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.

Notice that John has used the word 'truth' 5 times in the first four verses!

Exhortation v5-6

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.

John says that walking in truth involves loving one another and obeying God's commands. Just the things we all find difficult!

Warning v7-11

John warns the woman and her children about deceivers who do not acknowledge that Jesus has come in the flesh.

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

This was about 60 years after the resurrection. Many of those who had walked with Jesus or Peter or Paul had died and, as yet, there was no written New testament. The Gospel was being spread as people moved around and shared the good news with those they met. The core Christian doctrines were still being worked out so people could only share as much as they understood at the time.

The Roman society of the day was strongly influenced by the prevailing philosophy, Gnosticism, and this philosophy was spread in the same way as the Gospel, by sharing as people moved around. This meant it was easy for new Christians to be influenced by 'teachers' who may have been Christian, Gnostic or a mixture of the two.

John writes to warn about the false Gnostic teachers. He calls them *deceivers*, and *the antichrist*, and says that they *do not have God*. What they are sharing is not the truth, but is a *wicked work*. The false teachers should not be welcomed into the Christians' houses.

Gnosticism taught that God is spirit and is totally good. The world (including mankind) is natural and is evil. There are cosmic spheres that separate God from the world and protect Him from the world's evils, and they which are ruled by archons, or spiritual powers. The way that people can come to know God (and receive salvation) was by special knowledge (gnosis). As someone receives this enlightenment they work their way up and gradually become enlightened and more like God. This may take a long time and carry on through a number of lifetimes. The enlightenment comes from teachers like Jesus, (and others).

The 'enlightened' tended to think of themselves as superior to those below them. They considered anything to do with the world or the flesh as being evil and tended to separate themselves off as a 'spiritual elite'. They also thought that as they were enlightened they could do what they liked and this led to justification of all sorts of evil behaviours.

John writes that the deceivers *do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh*. That's because they believe that the flesh is evil so Jesus couldn't be God if He was evil!! But one of the great truths of the Gospel is that God became Man in Jesus Christ, and that He was without sin. *The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.* John 1:14. Then *God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.* 2 Corinthians 5:21.

So the false teachers were undermining one of the core beliefs of Christianity, that Jesus was the Son of God and also the Son of Man. That's why John warned the woman to *watch out that you do not lose what you*

These days truth is not a very fashionable concept. Not many would accept statements like 'the Bible is true'; 'Jesus is the only true way to God'; 'Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life'. Christians are often mocked when they make statements like these ones. That's because the prevailing philosophy is pluralistic: *You can believe whatever you like. What's true for you is true for you. It may not be true for me. There's no such thing as absolutes. There's no black and white. Everything's a shade of grey. Let's be tolerant of others' beliefs.....*

Regardless of the prevailing philosophies, John still calls us to *walk in the truth*.

have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. And that's why he said she should not welcome the false teachers into her house.

Gnostic philosophies strongly affected the society in which the early Christian Church developed so many of the New Testament books contain sections written to deal with this significant issue. (John's Gospel, Galatians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 John, 2 Peter and possibly 1 Corinthians).

These days Gnostic philosophies are still around and are strongly influencing the way we live. Many 'politically correct' government policies have their roots in Gnosticism! Sadly there are also hangovers of Gnostic philosophies in some parts of the Church e.g.

- the body is evil
- the natural is not as important as the spiritual
- you have to work hard to please God.

2 John is very relevant for us today!

The truth of the Gospel is central to all that we are as Christians and as the Church. We can't afford to water down the truth (as is happening in many liberal approaches to Christianity where essential truths like the virgin birth, the resurrection, salvation, heaven and hell are not just undermined, but are actually mocked). We are supposed to be tolerant and accepting of all views, not bigoted and narrow!

This is possibly the biggest threat that the Church faces at the present time, because it undermines Christianity right at its very core. Jesus said *I am the way, and the truth and the life; no-one comes to the Father but by Me.* John 14: 6. He is not a way to God; He is the way! There is no compromise here, because this is truth.

The early Church had exactly the same threat and responded by putting down their beliefs in Creeds. e.g. the Apostles Creed. The World Congress on Evangelism did the same.

See <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/manila-manifesto.html>

As Christians we need to be very clear on the truths of the Gospel and commit ourselves to knowing the truth, believing the truth, and being faithful to the truth.... or in John's words *walking in the truth.*

This involves

- continuing in the teaching of Christ v9
- acknowledging the Father and the Son v7,9
- not becoming entangled with other world views v10
- recognizing that ultimately any non-truth is a *wicked work* v11

And remember that Jesus said *You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* John 8:32.

Conclusion and Final Greetings (12–13)

John concludes his letter in a personal way:

I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.

Some years after John wrote 2 John the beliefs of the Church were encapsulated in the **Apostles Creed**. Many of the statements in the creed are direct refutations of Gnostic philosophies. These sections are in blue:

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth:
And in Jesus Christ his **only Son our Lord,**
Who was **conceived by the Holy Ghost,**
Born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was **crucified, dead, and buried:**
He descended into hell;
The third day he **rose again from the dead;**
He **ascended into heaven,**
And **sitteth on the right hand of God the**
Father Almighty;
From thence he shall come to **judge the**
quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost;
The holy catholic Church;
The Communion of Saints;
The **Forgiveness of sins;**
The **Resurrection of the body,**
And the Life everlasting.
Amen.

Discussion questions

What are the main truths of the Gospel?

How do you determine whether something you believe is true or not?

Examine your own life. Are you walking in the truth in all areas of your life? If not what do you need to do about it? How can you be sure you are walking in the truth?

Read the section on Gnosticism in the study on Colossians at <http://rosscallaghan.yolasite.com/bible-studies.php> Identify the core Gnostic beliefs and ways that they are influencing society and churches today. What Christian truths counter these Gnostic philosophies?

Tolerance is often described as a Christian value. Do you believe this is so? How should Christians relate to other beliefs, world views and religions, that hold very different “truths” to the truths of the Gospel?

Write down a personal creed stating what you believe.

What have you learned from your study of 2 John? How will you apply this in your life?

3 John

Author John, one of Jesus’ disciples and a leader of the early Church.

Written to “my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth”. v1.

Date Around 90AD when John was quite elderly.

Place Probably written in Ephesus.

Type Letter to a friend. Probably not intended for public reading.

Theme Walking in the truth.

Purposes Itinerant teachers sent out by John were being rejected by Diotrephes, a leader in one of the Churches. John wrote to his friend Gaius to encourage him to walk in the truth, and give him instructions regarding Diotrephes.

Key verses

I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. v2.

Do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. v11.

Outline

Greetings (1–2)

John greets his friend Gaius and then prays for him. *Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.* What a wonderful prayer! Isn’t this something that we could pray for just about anyone?

Commendation of Gaius (3-8)

John then commends Gaius for his *faithfulness to the truth*, and because he continues *to walk in the truth*. *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

Notice the emphasis on walking in the truth (as in 2 John). That's because the early Christians like Gaius were being influenced by Gnostic teachings that were common in the culture of the day. Being faithful to the truth was difficult for them (as it is for us!) but was vital for their Christian lives and for the ongoing spread of the gospel.

John had received reports from the Church about Gaius which said he was being faithful and loving to the brothers in Christ (probably itinerant preachers who had visited to Church to share the gospel). Gaius is encouraged to send them out *in a manner worthy of God* because they had *received no help from the pagans*. *We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.*

Condemnation of Diotrephes (9-12)

John then gives instructions about Diotrephes. Diotrephes appears to be a Christian leader with a great deal of spiritual pride. He *loves to be first and will have nothing to do with us*. Indeed he is *gossiping maliciously about us*. And he *refuses to welcome the brothers*. He also *stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the Church*.

Gaius is told not to imitate him. *Do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God*. Rather he should be like Demetrius who is *well spoken of by everyone – even by the truth itself*.

Conclusion, benediction and final greetings (13–14)

John completes his letter by saying *I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.*

Discussion questions

Compare the qualities of Gaius and Diotrephes. What motivates one Christian leader to be loving and faithful to the truth, and another to be judgmental and proud?

Diotrephes could well have believed he was right and that what he was doing was protecting the Church. Yet he was soundly condemned by John! How can Christian leaders judge the state of their hearts? How can they know that they are truly doing what God wants, and not just what they want?

Most Christian leaders genuinely believe they have right attitudes and that they are walking in the truth. What evidences will show in their Churches if they do have right attitudes and are walking in the truth? What evidence will show in their Churches if they are not?

Analyse your own heart attitudes in the light of the qualities John commended in Gaius and condemned in Diotrephes. What aspects do you need to work on?

What are the implications of verse 11 for those who seek to be leaders in the Church?

What have you learned from your study of 3 John? How will you apply this in your life?