

# God's Message to Us in Second John

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## Introduction

Last week, in our sermon series in which I am preaching a sermon on each book of the Bible, we looked at God's Message to us in the First Epistle of John.

- I mentioned to you that in addition to his gospel, John wrote three epistles (or letters).
- The first one, which we looked at last week, was the longest—the other two were the kind of letters you write on a single page.

In his first letter, John told us that he wrote in order that those who believe might know that they have eternal life and that they might continue to believe.

- You remember that he gave us the marks of eternal life—things that are true of a person that has eternal life.
  - At the foundation of it all, he showed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, brought eternal life into the world and that He gives it to all who come to Him in faith.
  - When we have truly come to Him, looking to Him for cleansing by His blood,
    - we walk in the light (seeing our sin)...
    - we keep God's commandments...
    - we continue in the gospel...
    - we are God's children who love one another...
    - we have God's help in answered prayer and in the working of the Holy Spirit...
    - and we are born of God through faith in Jesus Christ.
  - John warned us that we can only have eternal life through faith in Jesus, and that if we do not believe, we do not have life.
    - He told us, therefore, to keep ourselves from idols—idols are all efforts to connect with God apart from Christ.

Second John is written to exhort the one John calls "the elect lady" to continue in both love and truth.

- Of course, this exhortation is meant for all believers everywhere—I remind you again that what Paul said in Romans is as true today as it ever was.
  - **Ro 15:4: For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.**
- All believers are to endeavour to walk in truth and love.
  - This is a subject that is very close to my own heart.
  - When I was first sent to plant a church here in Halifax, that was the thing I emphasised that this church needed to be.
    - A church that held to sound doctrine—to all that is revealed in scripture; and a church that was full of love.
- I was especially burdened about this because I had found in my experience that some churches seemed to be all about holding to the truth, but had little concern for love; while other churches were all about love, but had little concern for truth.
  - Over the years I have continued to see how easy it is to gravitate to one and exclude the other.

- John is writing against that.
- He is writing to urge “the elect lady,” and so all of us, to continue in both.

But before we break into his message, you probably want to know who this elect lady is.

- Well, I will tell you that from fairly early on, good expositors have been divided.
  - Some believe that she is a church, others see her as an individual—a lady who showed hospitality to itinerate missionaries.
- The ambiguity is, perhaps, a good thing, because as far as we are concerned, the truths taught her apply to churches as well as individuals.
  - However, I am going to refer to the elect lady as a church for the following reasons:
    - Because whenever letters are written to individuals, the individuals are addressed by name (Third John is to Gaius, Philemon is to Philemon).
    - Because there is no example of calling an individual “elect”—think of Paul writing to Philemon and saying, “to the elect Philemon,” or “the elect man.”
      - To avoid this some have said that her name was *Electica*, but if that is true then she has a sister with the same name (in verse 13—“*Electica* your sister” who sends greetings).
    - Because verse 13 is most likely referring to a church and not the elect sister of an elect individual lady who happens to be with John.
    - Because the church is often personified as a female (John himself does this in Revelation), so it would not be unusual for him to do it here. For example, the church is called a bride or a virgin daughter.
    - Because when speaking to her, John uses the second person plural part of the time (for example, in verse 6 and verse 10... in verse 10, he says, “if anyone comes to you (plural) and does bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your (plural) house nor greet him.”
    - Because when he speaks of her children, he says that he was glad to find some of them walking in the truth—an odd way to speak to an individual...
    - Because there are no personal references to her...
    - Because it is rather awkward for John to tell her in verse 4, if she is an individual, that we have had a commandment from the beginning that we ought to love one another.

But again, the main thing is the clear message of the epistle that applies to both churches and individuals—that we continue in truth and love.

- Let’s take a look at what Second John says to us about this.

**I. First, we are taught here that truth is the root of Christian love in the church.**

A. Truth is our bond—it is the very reason we are together as a church—because we are fellow believers—those who believe what God has revealed to us.

- Mindful of his subject, John talks about this right from his opening address:
  - Look at verse 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,**

1. You see how he says that he loves them *in truth*.

- Truth is the realm in which John loves them.

- We are a church because we have come to a knowledge of the truth and we have received the truth and all profess to believe the truth.
  - Together, we agree that there is one God who made heaven and earth, that He is the creator, lawgiver, and judge; that we are sinners; that Jesus is the Son of God who became flesh and who died on the cross to atone for our sin; that only by believing in Him do we have eternal life.
  - We love one another in particular as those who are in the truth—who know the truth and believe the truth in a world that denies it.
    - It is not that we do not love those outside the truth—but that there is a special love we have for those who are in the truth.
2. Notice how John points out as well that this same “**love in truth**” is shared by all who have come to know the truth.
- Not only does John love the elect lady, but so do “**all those who have known the truth.**”
    - It is a characteristic of Christians—there is a bond with everyone who believes.
    - We have this great love for our Saviour who has brought us into the truth and who has saved us by His blood...
      - Therefore, as soon as we find others who believe the truth, we immediately have this special bond of love.
      - As John said in his first letter, **1 Jo 5:1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.**
3. In verse 2, John makes this point even stronger.
- He says that this love he and others have for the elect lady is (v. 2) **because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:**
    - The truth has become a permanent part of us—it abides in us—or remains in us, as he says, forever.
    - We love one another as those who now live in the reality of the true God, and will continue together as brothers and sisters in His family forever.
      - The very deliverance that He has accomplished in us not only brings pardon of our sin, but also restores love.
        - Now, by His grace, instead of living according to our sinful desires, in Christ we live to please God and to be a blessing to one another.
        - Instead of caring only about ourselves, in Christ we are taught to care about others—to love them as He has loved us.
        - We have overcome the world with its lust and pride.
- B. John communicates his certainty that in this fellowship of love and truth, they will continue to be the recipients of God’s blessing.
1. Notice how he words his greeting in verse 3 in view of this theme—a little different than the way Paul does...

- In particular, the greeting stands out because he speaks of “love and truth” as the “place” where the blessing will surely be found.
  - It says (v. 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.**
2. The church, where truth and love are found, is the place where God will bestow grace, mercy, and peace.
    - **Grace** refers to His ongoing help to the guilty and the undeserving—so that we can keep on in the love and truth...
    - **Mercy** refers to His ongoing help to the needy and helpless...
    - And **peace** refers to the overall well-being that stems from having harmony with God—broken harmony that is restored to make us whole.
  3. This reminds me very much of Psalm 133 where we are told that where brothers dwell together in unity, *there* the Lord commands His blessing.
    - Notice that John does not just say, “May you have grace, mercy, and peace,” but he says that where love and truth are, “you will have grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father.”

TRANS> The church of the elect is the place where love and truth are found together.

- God’s blessing is found where these are found.
- The people that He has blessed and the people whom He will continue to bless are not the ones who reject the truth in the name of love,
  - nor are they ones who forget to love in their zeal for the truth,
  - but His blessing is found among the people who love one another in the truth.
- How we ought to yearn to be a people who continue in both love and truth!

## II. In verses 4-6, John urges the members of church to walk in both love and truth.

- A. He begins by expressing the great delight he has whenever he sees those who walk in the truth.
  - Look at verse 4: **I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth...**
1. This is what gives the dear elderly apostle greatest joy.
  - Over the years he has seen so many that, as in the parable of the sower, start out well but do not continue to walk in the truth—
    - So it thrills him whenever he sees those who continue through trials and temptations, living in the truth that was first delivered to them.
2. Hearing him say this was surely a powerful stimulation to them to continue in the truth.
  - If this elderly apostle who loved them so well finds his joy in this—and they know his judgment is very sound—it motivates them and encourages them to recognise the importance and the value of abiding in the truth.
  - They love him and they want to please him... they know that he wants what is best for them—and they know that it is best.

- As believers, we know that walking in the truth is essential...that those who depart from the truth show that they were never really of the truth.
- The Apostle John reminds us of how important it is for us and others to come to the truth and to continue in the truth.

TRANS> But John does not stop with telling them how glad it makes him...

B. He reminds the members of the church that God has actually *commanded* us to walk in the truth and in love.

1. The reminder to walk in truth is given at the end of verse 4.

- I will read the whole verse for context: **I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.**

- It might seem strange to us (given the way we think) to be told that God has commanded us to walk in the truth.
- a. For one thing, we tend to think that truth is relative, but that is wrong.
  - The world we live in is the world that God created, and it is not only a world of moral absolutes, but also a world of objective realities.
  - In our rebellion, we want to think that God is just a mental construct... something that we have made up in our own minds and that we can modify and adjust at will.
    - But that is not true. God is a personal Creator whose personality belongs to Him, not to us.
    - His very name, Yahweh (or Jehovah), reminds us that He is the self-existing God—it means “I am that I am.”
  - This means that He is the original existing one—the eternal being who made all other beings that have been made.
    - We cannot suppose Him to be whatever we want, but we must bow to Him as He is.
    - He Himself is the truth—and what He declares to be morally right or wrong is morally right or wrong, regardless of what we think.
- b. For another thing, being commanded to walk in the truth seems strange to us because we suppose that people just believe what they believe and can't do otherwise.
  - To a certain extent, this is true, but our helplessness is a moral inability rather than an intellectual one.
    - We cannot believe because we refuse to believe.
    - We are in desperate rebellion against God, so we deny the truth about Him, and about all that He says.
  - Romans 1 tells us that everybody knows of God's eternal power and divine nature—it is revealed not only in Scripture (which not everyone has) but through creation (which all have).
    - It is rebellious not to believe that God is, and it is rebellious not to believe in His eternal power and divine nature.

- Atheists, agnostics, Mormons, Muslims, and Hindus are not just confused; they are in rebellion against God.
- c. As those in Christ, we know that God’s word, the Holy Scripture, is truth; as Jesus said, “Your word is truth.”
- When we do not believe certain things that are in God’s word, we are not just confused—there is rebellion in our unbelief, there is an antipathy against the things that we do not believe.
  - Of course with truth, just as with moral obedience, there are different degrees of rebellion.
    - for example, our disagreement over whether Christmas should be celebrated is not same as our disagreement of whether we should baptise infants...
    - And our disagreement about that is not nearly as significant as our disagreement about whether the Bible is God breathed throughout or if it contains errors from men...
      - At this point we are warranted to call people to leave those rebellious churches that don’t believe the word...
    - But our disagreement about that is not nearly as significant as our disagreement about whether Jesus is truly the Son of God or just a good moral teacher...
      - At this point, we are dealing with those who can no longer be considered believers.
- d. As those who are **commanded** to walk in the truth, it is our duty to search the scriptures and to renew our minds in the truth so that we might know the truth, confess the truth, and live according to the truth.
- While we will all have areas where we are wrong, we must recognise that it is our responsibility to continue to grow in the truth.
    - As we accept what God has already shown us, He will guide us into more and more truth, just as Jesus promised us.
- So there is a command to walk in the truth...
2. Then (in verse 5) John speaks of the command to love.
- He pleads with us to obey the command to love in verse 5: **And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.**
- a. By pleading with us, John reminds us of the importance that he places on love as well as truth.
- Again, we ought to feel the weight of an aged apostle pleading with us because of his genuine concern for us... because he, with excellent judgment, knows how important this is.
- b. He mentions that this is a new commandment that is actually not new... something he spoke about in 1 John and also reported that Jesus spoke about in his gospel.

- The idea is that ever since God made us (from the beginning), He has commanded us to love one another.
    - It has always been His will for those who were made in His image to be like Him in having a genuine love for others (as God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have loved each other from all eternity).
    - When we don't love, it is a gross distortion that infuriates God.
      - So the commandment to love goes back to the beginning... it is old.
  - But this commandment is new, because (as we saw last week in First John), the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come.
    - He has come in our flesh and He has set a new standard for us of what it means to love.
    - He loved us so much that He came here from glory and went to the cross to bear our sins so that we might be pardoned.
      - That is real love!
      - That was the beginning of us human beings finally doing what God wants... Jesus was the first one to fully please Him.
      - And this love is the defining character of the kingdom that Jesus has established—it is a society where He brings us up to His standard of love—a perfection that will be complete in glory—but must begin now.
3. John makes it clear that this love that is commanded is not love according to our own idea of love, but is rather the keeping of God's commandments.
- In verse 6, he says: **This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.**
    - a. We especially need to hear this today because we are confused about this.
      - There are a lot of examples that show how confused we are about love.
        - A mother will claim that she dearly loves her children even though she does not take care of them. She may have warm sentiments toward them, but she does not love them.
        - A young man may tell a woman that he wants to have sex with her (even though they are not married) because he loves her, but that is not love because that is not in agreement with God's commandments.
    - b. But of course, we must not lose sight of all that love is and all that God has commanded us, especially when it comes to love.
      - He has commanded us to give to those who are in need.
      - He had commanded us to forgive and to be tender-hearted, to speak to the truth with each other, to be kind and gentle.
      - He has told us to pray for one another and to encourage one another in the Lord with His promises.
      - He has told us to admonish each other and to comfort one another with His word.

- c. Ours is a society that divorces love from God’s commandments, but John tells us that you can’t do that: **This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.**
  - Love and truth always go together.
    - They are not mutually exclusive—you never have to decide between them. When you chasten your child for sin, you are loving that child more than when you don’t chasten him... much more.
  - The point is that we are to have regard for all that God has said.
    - If we reject the truth, we do not love; and if we do not love, we are not walking in the truth.
    - Love and truth are not mutually exclusive—they are inseparable.

TRANS> And now we come to the last part of John’s letter.

- This appears to be his reason for writing about love and truth.

**III. In verse 7-11, he tells us that we must reject those who have deviated from the truth.**

- See how it is laid out for us.
- A. He begins by telling us that there are those who profess to be believers but who have deviated from the truth.
- He tells us that there are not just a few, but many of these:
    - **Verse 7: For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.**
1. The particular error here was Docetism—the view that Jesus was God, but that he only appeared to come in human flesh.
    - In their minds, God would never do that.
    - But if He didn’t, then according to Scripture, that would mean that Jesus could not have died for our sins or perfected our nature.
      - If He was not in our nature, how could He die in our place?
      - Likewise, if He was not in our nature, how could His life be acceptable to God in our behalf?
      - Without an incarnate Saviour who was tempted as we are, yet without sin, we are still in our sins and we still bear the guilt of our sin.
  2. John says the one who denies that Jesus came in the flesh is a deceiver and an antichrist.
    - You will remember that anti means *in place of*, so these are those who give you a substitute for the real Christ.
    - Of course this is true of those who teach errors in other ways as well—such as the prevailing error of our day that though He was a true human, He is not also truly God.
      - They are giving their hearers something other than Christ who saves.
      - They have rejected the truth and are not walking in the truth.
- B. John warns us to watch out lest we ourselves fall into the error of these deceivers.



- Look at verse 8-9: **Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. , Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.**
1. This is serious!
    - Those to whom John wrote knew of those that had once been part of the church who had now embraced these errors and were teaching them.
      - It is not just that they were a little off.
      - They were completely estranged from Christ and His saving work.
    - Verse 9 could not be any clearer.
      - Those who do not continue in the truth about Christ are cut off from God. They are destined for wrath and eternal punishment.
  2. In verse 8, John is warning us not to let that happen to us or to those we minister to.
    - a. They are deceivers. That is the reason we have to look to ourselves. They are insidious and subtle and very clever.
      - They clothe their lies to make them more palatable and they dress them up in smart clothes that look impressive and attractive.
        - As we saw in First John, they appeal to us in the areas where we struggle—telling us that the sins we find hardest to deal with are not really sins, or that the doctrines we find least attractive (like hell) are not really true.
      - They chip away bit by bit until at last we deny Christ.

TRANS> This has happened in the history of church again and again and it is happening today.

- b. We are in danger, John says, of a progressive loss of what we have received from Christ.
  - 1) First, of losing what we have worked for.
    - We work so hard to ground people in the truth. Paul and John and faithful ministers labour night and day to establish believers in the truth.
      - But these deceivers will try to undo that—to water down the doctrine, little by little.
    - It is hard work to bring sinners to receive the truth from God—because we are sinners.
      - But it is easy to soften the truth and to begin to let the harder doctrines go.
  - Let me urge all of you to study the Bible and to study your Catechisms.
    - Catechisms and confessions are statements of sound doctrine that the church has fought for over against errors.
    - They are of truths that are harder for people to believe.
      - It is very easy to soften them—very hard to move up to them.
  - We are in danger, as John says, of losing our full reward.

- 2) But we are also in danger of much worse... what we saw in verse 9—of actually denying Christ and being cut off from God.
- Surely you have seen this in the history of the church.
    - How did the United Church come to the place that it has ministers who don't believe that Jesus is truly God or that He was born of a virgin or that He is the only way of salvation?
    - It began with one generation moving away from sound doctrine as it is found in our confessions and catechisms—it began by saying that these truths were not important—should not divide us.
      - Then the next generation said that many things did not matter, such as how we worship God or practice church discipline.
      - Then the next began to say that parts of the Bible are not true... and on and on it goes—until finally they deny Christ.
  - It began by tolerating those who teach error.

C. John explains to us that we must not tolerate those who have rejected the truth.

- Look at verse 10-11: **If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; <sup>11</sup> for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.**
1. Many believers in John's day were on the move—some of them as teachers.
    - As they went from place to place, they depended on the hospitality of other believers. Inns were notorious for filthiness and debauchery.
      - So believers would extend hospitality to each other.
  2. But John is here prohibiting the opening of your home and your church (remember that churches met in houses) to those who denied that Jesus came in the flesh.
    - He says that when you do, you are actually participating in their false teaching.
    - Even to greet them is to endorse them when in fact you ought to denounce them.
      - To further their work is to spread their lies.
  3. This might seem harsh and unloving to us—but John has shown us that it is not.
    - We live in a society that has accepted the false notion that if you love someone, you have to condone their behaviour.
      - If you tell a person who is living in adultery or sodomy that they are living in sin and need to repent, our society calls that hate.
    - There are plenty of less blatant examples we could give.
      - A mother may have affection for her little child (that is one aspect of love), but if she refuses, in the name of love, to chasten the child when the child has transgressed God's commandments (such as the commandment to do all things without grumbling and disputing), then the mother is not walking in love.
      - The same would be true of elders who do not confront a man in the congregation who gets drunk or a young woman who moves in with her

boyfriend. They may say that they are not dealing with this because of love, but that is not love.

- How much more is this the case with false teachers!
  - If we support them when we ought to denounce them, we will soon find our churches to be full of their errors.
  - How can it be loving to embrace false teachers who are teaching lies about our Saviour that bring dishonour to Him, that lead His people away from Him, and that bring damnation on the false teachers themselves?
    - How is this love to our Saviour, to our fellow church members, or to false teachers?

**Conclusion:** Yes, my brothers and sisters,

- Love and truth do not exclude each other.
  - In fact, we can never have one without the other.
  - Our relationship of love as believers is founded upon truth in Christ, so we must never suppose that we can increase love by diminishing truth.