

Christian Hospitality
2nd John 3rd John.

James 1:16-27

1st John 2:1-14

Responsive Reading: Romans 16:16-20

Today we are going to be looking at 2nd John. So my intent is to use 2nd and 3rd John here as a sort of review of first 1st John. These are different letters, sent to different people but they contain the same themes of the book of 1st John we just finished. But before we can do that I think we need to set some ground work here to understanding this book, I think it is important to look at evidences of why it is believed that John wrote this book, and to who this book actually is written to. So lets start out this morning by reading this passage.

The greeting here is simply signed, The Elder to the Elect Lady and her children. It is pretty much agreed upon by scholars that The Elder is John, There are a few reasons for this which are proven both internally by the writing itself, and externally by other authors of the time. First, as I already mentioned the themes and subject of this letter has a direct connection to what we read in 1st John, and also bares the same similarity in 3rd John, These are both written in the same style and clearly appear to be written by the same person.

John referring to himself as The Elder is a fitting term, for at this time of this writing for it was later in life. Just like with 1st John, it is believed that this letter was written from Ephesus. Some scholars believe this passage was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD but most scholars put it later, and believe it was written more around the year 90 AD. Which actually I think make sense for that would put its writing to around the same time he wrote his first letter.

But that is not all, there is also external evidence, outside of the writing style, and subject matter to prove that this letter written by The Elder is in fact the Apostle John. John had a few associates, one who was the leader in the church of Smyrna, and the other the leader in the Church of Antioch. Ireneaus who was one of these associates quotes John's writing here in his own letters and calls John by name, also the same can be said for Polycarp who was the leader of the church in Smyrna. So here we see 2 of John's followers who refer to him by name in the writing of this book giving us external evidence of the authenticity of John as the author.

So now that we have established who the author of this book was, we need to figure out who it was written too. In 1st John there was not any formal greeting, but here we see he says that he is writing to the Elect Lady and her children. There is some debate as to who this elect lady may be, no one really knows, but there are 2 predominate views, One view is to take this greeting literally, that John sent this letter to a specific woman and her children. Another view is to take this greeting figuratively. Instead of understanding this as being a specific person, it can be understood as to be written to a church, and it's congregation.

Either way that you choose to understand this, either literally, or figuratively really makes little difference because this message can be applied to both individuals in their own life and ministry, as well as to the church.

that being said I fall out on the side of taking this literally, at face value. That John here was writing to a specific individual. It would seem to me by the tone and subject of this letter that it is most likely written to one specific individual. The book of 1st John was believed to be written to a whole series of churches, and believed that it was more of a form letter which had the personal greetings attached in the form of a cover letter. But here we see the greeting, so this is not a form letter written to a group of churches as 1st John was but a letter written for a specific individual for a specific purpose.

It would seem that since this is written around the same time as the 1st Epistle that if this was written to another church that it would make sense that John would have just included them in sending them his formal letter of instruction as he did with the other churches. But this letter here is more personal.

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, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: This love that John mentions here, is the same love he calls all Christian's to in his first epistle. Which was one of the tests of true faith. This elect lady whom I love, and not only I but all others who know the truth, and it is because of this truth that abides in us that we love one another.

This is the very purpose of John's writing this letter here, is because of the love shown toward fellow Christians, but along with it comes a warning to be discerning and careful not to show this same love and hospitality toward false teachers. It was a common practice at that time that Christians would open up their home to other Christians who would be traveling through. We see it often with the apostles as they journeyed that they would stay with others for a time before moving on to the next church.

This was something that this Elect Lady was doing, opening up her house and sharing her hospitality with traveling Christian brothers. We can conclude this because of verse 10, which says. "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him." So interestingly enough, while this practice of Christian hospitality and service toward each other greatly helped the spread of the gospel, it would seem that false teachers who were seeking to tear down the gospel would also take advantage of this hospitality.

Looking at verse 5-7 we see John is giving her the same warning he gave the churches in his first epistle. "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. 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. I think that there is kind of a circular message here, I have not written a new commandment, but it is the same we heard from the beginning, that we love one another. And this love is that we follow His commandments, and this is the commandment that you heard from the beginning, that we love one other, and you should walk in love.

It would seem that this Elect Lady was doing just that, opening up her home, showing hospitality to traveling brothers and sisters in Christ, but John goes on to warn her against false teachers. 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. So we see that John is warning her of the very same false teachers he warned the churches of in 1st John.

Verse 8, he says Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. I think here he is instructing her to judge according to what she has already learned. Do not be deceived by these false teachers, you already know the truth and if what these men are telling you does not align with the truth that you already know and are abiding in them dismiss them he says in verse 10 to not let them in your house, or even to greet them! John goes on to say that he who greets these false teachers shares in his evil deeds.

That may seem a little harsh on a surface reading, but we need to remember what was going on here. Offering hospitality to one of these false teachers was giving them support. Offering a place for them to stay, and food for them to eat while they go about deceiving and spreading false doctrine. If you are providing for them, and enabling them, you are endorsing them and offering them the opportunity to teach and spread their false belief.

There actually is a way that we can apply this actually to ourselves today. It isn't often that we need to open up our homes in the same way that was done in the early 1st century church, but we do still show support and hospitality through other means today. Chiefly one way that I could think of is through the giving of money. Just as John called upon this Elect Lady to be discerning on who she opened up her house to, we too should be discerning on who we give support to.

I don't need to tell you about all these so called teachers, and pastors, who seem to always have a new book coming out, or who are always asking for you to send them money which in turn they use to spread false doctrine. Just as the opening up your home in hospitality to a false teacher in the 1st century church had an effect of aiding the spreading of false doctrine, so is the same with generously giving to organizations, or authors of books who are deceivers and false teachers.

It seems that churches, and individuals have lost the ability to discern such things, and often times promote books, or programs, or conferences of people preaching dangerous false doctrines.

We need to be discerning, judging just as John calls this Elect Lady to do, or just as he called the churches he wrote to in 1st John to do. We need to apply the 3 tests that he gave us. I know it has been a few weeks, but we have gone over it quite a few times, does everyone remember what the 3 tests are?

Doctrine, obedience and love. I think it is important that we apply these 3 tests not only to ourselves, or to others who seek to teach, or preach to the congregation, or even to those who seek to join the local fellowship and gather of the saints we should also be wise and discerning and applying these test to those we give our support. We need to be careful that we are not aiding in the spreading of false doctrine for as John says here, for he who does so shares in his evil deeds.

This really is a sobering thought if we think about it. If we take just a moment to think of all these so called Christian organizations who are vying for our money and support. Many of them have political agenda's, who care little about the actual spreading of the gospel and are more concerned about politics and social issues. I am not saying that it is necessarily wrong to be concerned about such things, but the problem with these organizations is since their focus is on earthly issues they are quick to lock arms with others who would fail John's 3 tests. They operate on the idea of that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, but John says to not even greet these false teachers and prophets, Not to give our support, not to be ignorant and blind, but to be wise and discerning and careful that we are not

aiding in the spreading of false doctrines.

We see this all over in our politics, and in our churches today. The pulpit which should be used to preach God's word is now given away to special guests to come and stump for their political office, or is used to raise funds for social activists groups. Pastors stand in front of their congregation saying that they should give money to this or that organization, or help support this political candidate for they claim God, some will even go as far as to say that if you do not support this or that, or this political candidate, then they hint at even calling your salvation into question. No matter if the God that this person, or organization may claim, with just a little digging you can easily find out that it is not the God of the bible.

We as Christian's in this nation have failed, we have not been discerning, we have not judged rightly and we have allowed ourselves to be used, to be deceived and our focus has been drawn away from the word of God and we have in turned begun to focus on issues of this world. I think of the big thing that the SBC is going through now, this idea that we must seek racial reconciliation, we must atone for the sins of our fore fathers, and court the sensitivities of the people in our society.

Wrong, all that we must do is preach Christ and him crucified. When Christ is preached, lives are changed through the gospel, we do not need to concern ourselves with these petty issues of the world for the very love that God shows toward us, he works in us toward each other. You want racial reconciliation, preach Christ, Are you concerned about the way society seems to be going? Preach Christ. It is only through Christ and his word that there is any power for meaningful change. It is only through the changing of hearts that there can be any sort of revival. Not through political activism that so many churches have now focused their efforts upon.

I guess all of that is to say, that we need to heed John's warning here. Be careful what we put our support behind, we are not to lock arm in arm with false teachers and deceivers just so that we can help push forward some social, or political agenda. For in that support, we are not heeding John's words here and we very well may be sharing in the evil deeds of those who we show our support.

I do want to draw a distinction here though since I have entered the realm of politics in this message. I care little for what you do as individuals, who, or what you support is between you and God and what your conscious allows. All I ask is that you be discerning as to why you put your support behind someone. Do not be deceived that these people who are claiming Christ are actually true Christians just based on their claim, do not support them solely on this claim.

But I draw the line when it comes to churches and their support of such things. As I have already said the pulpit and the fellowship of the saints is to be centered around God, centered around worshiping him, not used to promote or support politicians or political action groups. I only mention this because this has seemed to become a major issue in the churches today.

I realize that what John is talking about here is not exactly the same thing but I think the principle still applies. He says that we should not entertain false teachers, false preachers, who are liars and deceivers for in doing we share in their error and evil deeds. I don't think it is to far of a stretch to apply it to this very thing of churches opening up their worship time for politicians and promotion of political action groups. This is a practice that needs to stop in this country and we need to get back to what is important, and to what the church is called to do and that is to preach the word, to pray, for each other.

So to summarize 2nd John here, there are a few important things that we can take away from this.

First off, is to be sure that we abide and walk in truth. John says that he rejoices greatly that he has found some of the Elect Ladies children walking in truth. But not walking in truth only, but also walking in love. John uses the term walking in truth, and walking in love. Notice that walking is something you do, it is active not passive, and it is something that you do with intention and purpose.

We are to actively, intentionally, purposefully, abide in Christ, throughout our life walking with him in truth and in love in all that we do. Then lastly here, be careful of false teachers, false preachers whom Satan uses to deceive and turn people away from the truth. Verse 8 John says, “Look to yourselves that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.” Why does he tell us to look to ourselves? It is because he is confident that we are walking in truth and in love have the holy spirit to guide and protect us.

We who know Christ, know the truth, we have the truth of God abiding in us, so when we come across something that does not align with that which we already know we can easily determine if it is false. We are to be discerning, and wise.

So my intention today is to look at 2nd and 3rd John, to wrap this all up before moving on to Philippians. This walk through 2nd John kind of took on a life of it's own but I still want to go over to 3rd John this morning, and it should be relatively quick for it is already much like what we have already gone through here in 2nd John.

So lets read 3rd John here. I just want to point out a few things, First notice how John is commending Gaius for his christian hospitality just as he did the Elect Lady in 2nd John. In verse 4, is just like verse 4 of 2nd John he says he has no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. For a pastor to see the people that God has given him care over are abiding in truth, and to be walking in faith and love is a great joy.

John does not have the same warning for Gaius here as he did to the Elect Lady in his 2nd Epistle, he actually spends most of it commending him and to continue to faithfully minister as he has to brothers, and to strangers. So what we see here in 2nd and 3rd John, really is 2 examples of what the ministry of the church, and of us as individuals should look like. We have the Elect Lady in 2nd John, and Gaius here who walk in truth and love, supporting the ministry and looking to the needs of those who come in faith and in truth and in doing so share in their ministry. Verse 8 he says, “We therefor ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers of the truth.”

But these 2 are not the only examples we see, we also see here an opposite example in Di-ot-re- phes. Verse 9, “I wrote to the church, but Di-ot-re- phes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.” But not only does he not receive John, he does not receive any brethren nor does he allow any in his church to do so, in the end of verse 10 he says that Di-ot-re- phes Forbids anyone who wishes to receive the brethren and puts them out of the church.”

John uses him as an example, and in verse 11 says “ Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.” This goes back to 1st John, 4:19-21. “We love him because he first loved us. If someone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have received from Him, that he who loves God must love his brother also.”

If you remember a few weeks ago I said that John is calling his readers to do something that is not popular today, and that is to judge to be sure that their confession is right and true. And we see John doing this very thing here, by the actions of Di-ot-re-phas, John judges, and determines that he is false and must be confronted and stopped. John warns Gaius here not to imitate what is evil, but to continue doing good as he has been.

It would seem that this Di-ot-re-phas probably was someone with some power, and influence and was likely leading the church that he was apart of astray. And John seemed to be concerned that his influence may even spread to other congregations. So John calls him out, and says that he will be dealing with him when he arrives.

So putting it all together here, closing out our time with the Apostle John we see what the believer's life should be like. One who is obedient, kind, loving, and walking in the truth of scripture. It is the same picture of the Christian's life that James set forth. We are known by our actions, by our deeds, Our lives should reflect that which we claim, we claim Christ, our lives should reflect Christ. As we close out this study if there is one thing we take from it, if there is one thing that we must remember I think we need to make sure that we remember John's 3 tests, The test of correct doctrine, obedience to God, and his word, and the love of God flowing through us toward each other.

Using these 3 tests, we will be able to do 2 things. 1, we will be able to be sure and know confidently that we are walking in truth and light, abiding with Christ. And secondly, we can use them to guard ourselves against those who would come to deceive or attempt to lead us astray.