

CHRISTIANITY (*defined*)
A Study of 1, 2 & 3 John
“A Love Letter to a Special Lady”
2 John 1:1-13

Pastor David O. Dykes, Green Acres Church, Tyler, Texas, June 27, 2021

INTRODUCTION: I think people can be really clever about some of the signs they make. Here are some of my favorites: (1) On a sign in front of a Podiatrist’s office: Time wounds all heels. (2) On a sign to a door to a maternity room: Push! Push! Push! (3) Sign at a Propane Gas filling station: Thank Heaven for little grills. (4) Sign on marquee in front of a funeral home: Drive carefully. We’ll wait. (5) Sign in Veterinarian’s Waiting Room: Sit! Stay!” (6) Sign on Septic Tank Truck: Yesterday’s Meals on Wheels (7) Sign on a Plumber’s truck: We repair what your husband fixed.

Speaking of signs, John wrote his entire Gospel story organized around seven signs – or miracles. The Gospel of John tells us how to **BELIEVE** in Jesus. The Epistles of John tell us how to **BEHAVE** as believers in Jesus Christ. Today we’re going to examine the epistle of 2 John. How many of you can ever recall hearing a message from 2 John? John begins this letter by identifying himself as an “elder.” It’s the word *presbuteros*, from which we get our word presbyterian. It is one of three words used for “pastor” in the New Testament. So instead of identifying himself as an Apostle, or the one who reclined next to Jesus at the last Supper, he just used the identifier “pastor.”

What makes 2 John unique is that it is the only book in the Bible addressed to a woman. This letter has a lot to say about love, so I’ve entitled this message “**A Love Letter to a Special Lady.**”

Some Bible scholars say that the term “The elect lady” is a reference to the church – but I see no reason to symbolize it. Because the term “lady” which is **ko-ree-ah** is found only here in 2 John. And he also addresses the letter to her children. Believers are called children of God many times in New Testament, but we are never identified as “children of the church.” And if the lady represented the entire church, there would be no

need to add anything about her children. But this elect lady also had a church meeting in her house, so it is a letter to all churches. Remember, for the first 300 years of the church, there were no church buildings. All meetings were outside or in homes.

Ladies, the truth is that women played an important role in the early church. For instance, in Acts 16 we meet Lydia. She was a successful international businesswoman – she was from Asia, but one branch of her business was in Philippi, which was Europe. She also hosted a church in her home. This lady, could be Lydia or another woman mentioned by name in the New Testament, but we'll have to wait until we get to Heaven to learn her identity. With that introduction, let's read the letter in its entirety – it takes less than two minutes to read.

2 John 1:1-13: The elder: To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not only I, but also all who know the truth— because of the truth that remains in us and will be with us forever. Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, in keeping with a command we have received from the Father. So now I ask you, dear lady—not as if I were writing you a new command, but one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. This is love: that we walk according to his commands. This is the command as you have heard it from the beginning: that you walk in love. Many deceivers have gone out into the world; they do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves so that you don't lose what we have worked for, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who does not remain in Christ's teaching but goes beyond it does not have God. The one who remains in that teaching, this one has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home, and do not greet him; for the one who greets him shares in his evil works.

Though I have many things to write to you, I don't want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face to face so that our joy may be complete. The children of your elect sister send you greetings.

John was probably writing this letter to this lady because she had written him to ask his advice. This was probably an influential lady who was known for showing hospitality to those who were the servants of the Lord – evangelists, church planters, and itinerant preachers. There weren't many hotels or inns back then, so people stayed in people's homes. This dear lady had encountered some false prophets who were seeking her hospitality, and she was asking John what to do. There are two themes in this short letter that are easy to identify: **Truth** and **Love**. John devotes the first few verses commending her for the love and fellowship she showed to those who embraced the truth. But the second part of the letter is a warning against accepting and promoting the false prophets who had come her way. There's a couple of very important lessons we can learn.

1. WE SHOULD CELEBRATE WITH OTHERS WHO WALK IN THE TRUTH. One of John's favorite subjects is truth. The word truth appears only nine times in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts – which is over half the New Testament. But John uses the word "truth" 40 times. So, it's fitting that he would celebrate with the lady about her children who are walking in the truth. If this elect lady is married, we don't know anything about her husband. She may be a widow. But we do know something about her children. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is all about transforming families. John wrote in verse 4, **"I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth."**

The original Greek makes it clear that out of all her children, some were walking in the truth. I'm sure the special lady would have preferred for John to have written that ALL her children were walking in the truth. There are many godly parents listening to me today, and you are blessed if ALL your children are walking in the truth. But even the best Christian parents have children who wander from the faith.

What's the difference between standing on the truth and walking in truth? In the Bible, walking is always a picture of our daily lifestyle. The Bible says, **"We walk by faith, not by sight."** It says, **"Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh."** Colossians 2:6 says, **"As you have received the Lord Jesus Christ, continue to walk in Him."** We walk in truth when we live a lifestyle of obedience to God. There are two steps we take when we walk in the truth.

Step 1. When we love God, we will obey God. In most religions, the followers obey their deity to keep from making their god angry at them. They obey out of fear or obligation. But we obey God because we love Him. Jesus said, **"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."** The **Jewish Talmud** noted that there were exactly 613 written laws of God that a good Jew had to keep. Can you imagine memorizing, much less keeping, 613 rules? And besides the written law, there were hundreds of oral laws passed down by the rabbis.

Jesus didn't come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. Take the Ten Commandments as an example. The first four of the Ten Commandments deal with our vertical relationship with God – we should have no other Gods, we shouldn't worship idols, or take God's name in vain, instead we honor Him by keeping the Sabbath. The last six Commandments deal with our relationship with people – we obey our parents, and we shouldn't commit adultery, steal, kill, lie or covet. Instead of trying to remember or obey all these commandments Jesus said, "Love God with all your being." That covers the first four commandments. Then He said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." That fulfills the last six commandments. Which leads to the next step in walking in the truth.

Step 2. When we obey God, we will love others. John pointed out that he didn't write a new commandment. But it was the same commandment that Jesus gave at the last supper and that John wrote about a dozen times in his first letter: Love one another. He expressed it this way in verse 6: **"This is the command as you have heard it from the beginning: that you walk in love."** We learned in 1 John that the best definition of love is laying down your life for others.

We celebrated **Memorial Day** a little over a month ago. There's a story from World War II about four heroes that you never hear much about these days. It's not politically correct because these four heroes were military chaplains that they gave their lives based on their faith.

In February of 1943 a Troop transport the SS Dorchester, was the target of a Nazi sub in the frigid waters off the coast of Newfoundland. As the ship was sinking, the four military chaplains started passing out life jackets. They soon realized that there were not enough life jackets do go around. So these four men of faith decided to practice agape. One was a Catholic priest, one was a Jewish rabbi, and two were Christian pastors. They had met during chaplaincy training and were good friends. So all four of them removed their own life jackets and gave them to others. One survivor said, "It was the most unselfish thing I will ever see this side of Heaven."

Then these four chaplains linked arms and sank with the ship. But here's the rest of the story. In 1948 President Harry Truman declared February 3 every year as Four Chaplains Day. And I checked, and it is still on the national calendar – but when was the last time you saw anything in the news about this story of love and sacrifice? Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.

So the first lesson we learn from this short letter is that we should celebrate with those who walk in the truth.

2. WE MUST BE CAUTIOUS OF THOSE WHO WANDER FROM THE TRUTH. John not only commends the elect lady for those who are walking in the truth and loving one another. He also issues a strong warning about false teachers. During this time, there was a heretical teaching about Jesus that claimed that Christ never had a human body, the Messiah was just a spiritual being. They denied the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth who was born of a virgin. And today, there are cults in Tyler who don't believe that Jesus was God in the flesh. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are two of the largest cults in Texas.

John wrote in verse 7, "**Many deceivers have gone out into the world; they do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.**" This is the fourth and final time John uses the word "antichrist." He warned about that antichrist in 1 John as well.

He wrote in 1 John 2:18, **“You have heard that Antichrist is coming, right now many antichrists have come.”** There will be a world leader in the last days who will be identified as the Antichrist, capital A. But during the days John lived, and even today, there are many antichrists (small a) who deny that Jesus is God. When it comes to God’s truth, there are two things that happen.

(1) God’s truth will be perverted. The devil has been perverting God’s word from the very beginning. He does this by misquoting God. When the serpent approached Eve in the Garden of Eden, he put a question mark where God had put a period. He said, “Did God really say you can’t eat from any tree in the Garden?” That wasn’t what God said at all. Satan twisted God’s Word. Then he lied to Eve. He said, “If you eat the forbidden fruit, you won’t die. You’ll become like god. You don’t need that Creator God. Honey, you can be your own god.”

The devil is still perverting God’s truth. Today he’s saying the same thing. “You don’t need God or the Bible. You can be your own truth. Just own your truth.” And when a person elevates their subjective feelings to a place of ultimate truth, they are actually being their own god. The attitude of millions of Americans is, “Why do I need the truth found in some dusty old book? I can be my own truth and live any way I want to. After all, it’s all about my happiness.”

Jesus warned in Matthew 7 that we should watch out for false prophets because they disguise themselves as part of God’s flock.

In Matthew 7:15 Jesus said, **“Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves.”** Jesus said the way you spot false prophets is by the fruit of their lifestyle. Good trees don’t produce bad fruit, and bad trees don’t produce good fruit.

(2) God’s truth must be protected. John wrote that this lady should be cautious about the people she welcomed into her home – which was also where the church met. He wrote that if anyone comes to her home and they are preaching some strange doctrine, or adding to the Bible, she shouldn’t welcome them. God has called us not only to **proclaim** His truth, to **practice** His truth, but also to **protect** His truth.

Jude wrote a short letter and in verse 3 he wrote, **“I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.”** That phrase, “Contend for the faith” means that we must actively protect God’s truth. Through the years I’ve heard preachers interpret verse 10 to mean that if someone from the Mormon church or Jehovah’s Witnesses comes to your front door, you shouldn’t even invite them in. I’ve even heard preachers use this verse to say you should slam the door in their faces. But I don’t think that’s what John is saying here.

I heard a joke about a woman who was a faithful member of her Baptist Church. One Saturday afternoon, two Jehovah’s Witness show up at her front door. It was a well-dressed man and woman who asked if they could come in. She invited them in and once they found out she was a Baptist they began to ask her a lot of tough Bible questions she couldn’t answer. They asked her to find where the word “trinity” was found in the Bible. They asked her if she knew God’s real name. She became very flustered by the time they left.

She complained to one of her friends. Her friend said, “I can tell you how to get rid of them. The Jehovah’s Witnesses don’t believe in saying the pledge of allegiance to the flag, or donating blood, or even celebrating Christmas, so make them do those things and they won’t come back.

So she was ready for their next visit. Sure enough a couple of weeks later a different man and woman showed up at her front door and rang the doorbell. She opened the door and before they could say a word, she pulled them in. She pulled out an American flag and led them in saying the Pledge of Allegiance. Then she pulled out a couple of blood donor cards and had them fill them out. Finally, she opened the closet door and pulled out small Christmas tree and said, “Let’s sing ‘Joy to the World.’”

When she had finished, the couple looked her and were speechless. Finally the woman said, “Well, what have you got to say about that?” The man said, “I don’t know what to say. We just moved in next door and we came over to ask to if we could borrow some ice.”

I had to change that punch line because thirty years ago when I told that joke, I said the two visitors were ladies selling Avon. But hardly anybody younger than sixty remembers “Ding Dong, Avon calling.” The point is that we shouldn’t be rude to anyone. The Bible teaches that we should show kindness to strangers. Remember the lady receiving this letter probably had the church meeting in her home. So John was warning her not to give these false prophets a platform to spread their false doctrine.

And that’s the lesson for every church. I’ve always been careful to never invite someone to preach here unless I’ve heard them preach or they are endorsed by someone I trust. The same goes for our small groups. In thirty years that I’ve been here I’ve had to fire two teachers of small groups because they were not teaching the correct Bible doctrine. That’s pretty good for a church our size for three decades.

CONCLUSION: To summarize the message of this love letter to a special lady here’s the sermon in a sentence: **WE MUST MAINTAIN A HEALTHY BALANCE BETWEEN TRUTH AND LOVE.** Paul writes in Ephesians 4:15 that we should always speak the truth in love. We need both truth and love. If you take truth away from love, it loses its power. It becomes nothing more than compromise and sweet, sticky sentimentality. But if you take love away from truth it becomes nothing more than harsh, angry brutality. There are those who hammer out Biblical morality with no sense of love or kindness.

God wants to use you as a channel of His love and truth to those around you. In 2010 there was a movie entitled *The King’s Speech* about British King George V who had a speech impediment. The movie was historically accurate even to the detail about a speech King George gave over the radio in 1930. The broadcast was to be heard in America and in the middle of the broadcast a cable at the Columbia Radio System in New York broke. Suddenly a million listeners couldn’t hear the King’s voice. A junior technician by the name of Harold Vivien grabbed both ends of the wire. Because it was a radio broadcast, the voltage didn’t kill him, but it delivered a nasty shock. But Harold’s body completed the circuit and Americans were able to hear the voice of the king. He held on for several minutes until the wire could be repaired. He was the living

link that allowed the voice of the king to get through. That's a wonderful picture of who we are. We are the living link to deliver the king's message of truth and love. Will you broadcast it to the world?