

**Text:** 2 John 1-6

**Title:** Love, truth, and obedience

**Truth:** The Christian must walk in truth, love, and obedience.

**Date/Location:** Sunday July 14, 2019 at FBC

## Introduction

Note the helpful and salutary effects that a short letter can have.

In his expositional commentary, J. M. Boice reminds us that there were problems in the local churches even back at the time of the apostle John. This helps us keep our problems in perspective, so we don't get overwhelmed. It also reminds us that we are responsible to address the problems we have.

Hospitality is an important issue in both 2 and 3 John, but it is not the only or central issue. Hospitality is one way to show Christian love—and exercising love *is* central to the Christian faith. John gives us some parameters or guardrails to protect our exercise of Christian love from running amok. We may think we are exercising love, but when that exercise is in support of false teaching (or sinful living) we can diminish our reward in heaven and share in the evil deeds of others.

It is not enough that you yourself walk in the truth. It is also necessary that those you support financially also are walking in the truth. Hospitality is a form of financial support. This is not meant to encourage division over small matters. It is a strong warning against supporting those who deny the Biblical doctrine of Jesus Christ.

## I. Author and Recipients, v. 1-2

A. The author is the apostle John. The identity of the author has been debated, with some suggesting that it is another John named "John the Elder." There is some historical evidence in the church fathers that has been interpreted to say so, but the majority of the church throughout time have understood this to be John who wrote the Gospel of John , 1 John, and Revelation. You could do a little character study of John by spending time with the following verses: **Matthew** 4:21, 10:2; **Mark** 1:19, 3:17, 5:37, **Mark** 9:2, 9:38, 10:35, 13:3, 14:33; **Luke** 5:10, 6:14, 8:51, 9:28, 9:49, 9:54, 22:8; **John** 13:23, 19:26-27, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20; **Acts** 3:1-4, 3:11, 4:13, 4:19, 8:14, 12:2; **Galatians** 2:9; **Revelation** 1:1-9, 21:2, 22:8. Let me know if you find some other verses.

B. The recipients are the "elect lady and her children." Given our tendency to interpret the text as plainly as possible, you can understand how I take

this to refer to a woman known to John. She had a number of offspring. In other words, John is writing to a family whose husband/father is not present. Perhaps he has died. I don't believe the lady is John's wife.

1. I do not take this to be a coded or symbolic reference to a church assembly. John addressed a local church directly elsewhere (see Revelation 2:1, and the other six churches addressed in chapters 2-3). If this were a reference to a church, it would seem that the lady is the church...which is the believing people...and who then are the children of the church? I suppose it could be a symbolic lady (a church) with literal children (the junior church attenders), but that is a bit of a stretch.
  2. Either understanding can handle the plural references in the book. For example, the command in verse 6 is given to "you" in the second person plural.
- C. The recipients are further specified as ones whom John **loves in the truth**. This is not a marital or romantic love, but instead is the Christian love (agape) of brothers and sisters, taught by God as part of the "Christian instinct" (1 Thess. 4:9; Romans 5:5; John 13:35; 1 John 4:21). John's love is **in the truth**. Christian truth forms the boundaries of the various facets of love: giving, compassion, concern, appreciation, etc. To increase love, we do not decrease truth. Rather the opposite: increase the truth held in common, and our love for one another will increase as well.
- D. Note that John calls the lady **elect**. It is evident that John means she is chosen by God for salvation. That is a Christian doctrine.
- E. There were a number of others who know the truth—believers in the Christian faith—and they also appreciated this woman very much. This leads me to believe that this is a prominent Christian woman who was a blessing in time past to others. Perhaps she showed wonderful hospitality to many of the Christians and she became known to others through this ministry. That is speculation, but what we know is that she was well loved. Think about the blessing of this kind of recognition; and also the difficulty of it!
- F. The common bond that connected John and his readers is stated in verse 2. It includes Christian doctrine that they hold in common and is that abstract concept which causes them to love one another. But Christianity is far more than doctrine. It is doctrine that transforms and it is teaching that, when embraced, brings with it the Spirit of God. He abides in us and will be with us forever. See John 14:16. Note the text says that the truth

abides or lives within us and is with us forever. This seems to be more personal in nature than mere words or ideas.

## II. Greeting, v. 3

- A. This is a standard New Testament letter greeting with a prayer wish for grace, mercy, and peace to be the portion of the recipients. **Grace** is unmerited favor; **mercy** is withholding of the punishment of demerit; and **peace** is what results when God's grace and mercy are applied to us. An entire atmosphere of peace surrounds us and is in us in salvation.
- B. The greeting also has two "from" statements. The first is that John wishes these aspects to come to them from God the Father. The second is that he wants them to come to the readers from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. This is a good verse to use that identifies Jesus as the Son of God. He is, was, and always will be related to the Father that way. And again, remember that when we say "son of" we do not mean "offspring of" but rather "sharing the same nature as." For more on this, refer to the sermon from February 24, 2019 in the evening service.<sup>1</sup> The parallel between Father and Son supports the truth that they are equal.
- C. It is only within the love of God and the truth of God that grace, mercy, and peace can be delivered to a person.

## III. Rejoicing, v. 4

- A. John is letting mom know that he has found some of her offspring walking in the truth. They are following God's way and not the ways of the world.
- B. Perhaps he encountered them in different places near where he is living, but at some distance from the elect lady.
- C. Walking in truth is the mark of a genuine believer.

## IV. Asking, v. 5-6

- A. John is concerned that this dear lady continue in her walk with Christ. Perhaps she has shown some evidence of faltering that John must address—perhaps in particular with the problem of verses 7-11.
- B. So he asks her to rekindle obedience to the command to love one another. This is the ethic that lies beneath all Christian conduct toward God and people. This is not a new command, but is in fact a very old one. Recall "new" passages like Matthew 22:37-40, John 13:34-35, and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fbcaa.org/news/729/14/The-Trinity-Eternal-Sonship>

“old” ones like Leviticus 19:18, and Deuteronomy 6:5. There is nothing new here because the commandment to love God and love one’s neighbor is 3500 years old on paper, and it existed long before that in the expectations of God.

- C. Loving our brothers and sisters and unbelieving acquaintances and the lost around us and even our enemies is *the thing that we do*. Other religions might shun the fallen or kill the infidels or burn the heretics, but not Biblical, actual Christianity.
- D. In verse 6 we come to a confusing part where we have commandments (plural) and commandment (singular). What is the meaning of this? I will try to explain: John has told us that the commandment (singular) that he is writing is that we love one another (verse 5). Then he defines what love is, which is to walk according to God’s commandments (plural, verse 6a). Then he reiterates that this commandment (singular) is the one that we must live by—namely, to love one another. Love is the command that includes all other commandments.
- E. The highlight of the verse is the definition of love. This shows what agape love actually is. It is not an exciting emotion. It is not a fuzzy feeling. It is an objective thing—obedience to God’s commands. These commands are not the 10 commandments or the Jewish laws, but rather the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. That detail aside for now, the point is that we love God if we obey Him. That’s it. If we don’t obey God, then we cannot claim to love Him. If we don’t obey Christ, then we cannot claim to love Him.

I think this principle applies more broadly as well. For example, if you don’t obey your parents, don’t claim to love them!

## Conclusion

The Christian life is three-dimensional: love, truth, and obedience. Our love operates in the realm of Christian truth and is demonstrated by obedience to God’s commands. “To love one another” is one of those commands that we obey and thus show the genuineness of our faith. Note verse 4: “**walk in truth**”; verse 6a: “**walk according to His commandments**”; verse 6b: “**walk in the commandment [love].**” And yes, these are commands. God does have the right to give imperatives.

Actually Christian life has more than three dimensions. Another three are grace, mercy, and peace. Rejoice in these blessings from God!

## Additional Notes

1. Mormons. “Mormons do not accept the traditional Christian view of the Trinity.”<sup>2</sup> It often has been understood by outsiders that Mormons believe that Jesus is the brother of Satan. Mormons try to distance themselves from that claim, saying that all created beings are in a sense “siblings,” and Jesus was one of those created beings. In that sense he is a sibling of all, including Lucifer. But this nuance is usually missed, and it doesn’t make any substantial difference. “But both the scriptures and the prophets affirm that Jesus Christ and Lucifer are indeed offspring of our Heavenly Father and, therefore, spirit brothers... But as the Firstborn of the Father, Jesus was Lucifer’s older brother.”<sup>3</sup>
2. Jehovah’s witnesses. They teach that Jesus is not God, but is merely “a god.” Jesus is a separate entity and not part of a “trinity.”<sup>4</sup>
3. Muslims. They use many of the same kind of arguments that Jehovah’s Witnesses do against the deity of Jesus Christ. Their god is Allah, who is a unity and not a trinity. They believe Jesus did not die on the cross.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/14/us/politics/14mormon.html>

<sup>3</sup> Jess L. Christensen, quoted at <https://carm.org/mormonism/teachings-of-mormonism>

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jehovah%27s\\_Witnesses\\_beliefs](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jehovah%27s_Witnesses_beliefs)