

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

Teachers Good And Bad

May 27th, 2012

2/3 John

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to 2 John. If you are right up to date with your Bible readings then you will have read 2 John this morning. It is one of the smallest books of the New Testament and it is not often preached on in the church, in fact, I can't ever recall having heard a sermon on 2 John and so this morning will be a first I'm sure for many of us. We are actually going to look at 2 and 3 John simultaneously because they really do tell a collective story. John is by this time in his life living in Ephesus and he is functioning as a sort of Bishop with pastoral oversight over a number of churches in the greater Ephesus area. We are all familiar with the 7 churches of Revelation 2-3 and there may have been other smaller churches also that were under the umbrella of John's care. The church in Ephesus had a remarkably rich history, having been founded by the preaching of the Apostle Paul and having been pastored by Timothy but it was now drifting into a season of heresy and division. These two letters that John writes are written pastorally and surgically. He aims to cut out the cancer of heresy and to firm up and encourage those who are holding fast to the truth of the Gospel.

By way of approach, I think we will read the two letters straight through and then draw out the four principle concerns that present themselves quite clearly. The letters are very short, about the length of a standard size piece of parchment. Let me begin reading to you from John 2; this is God's Word:

¹The 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,

I'll just say a quick word here about the identity of this elect lady. Most scholars believe that this is a coded way of addressing the church and the individual members of it. The elect lady is the church proper and her children are the members. Why John would have spoken in code is not clear, though perhaps the church was undergoing a local persecution and it was thought better to write in this way, that is generally the line that is taken and as the letter unfolds I think you will see it is the most logical explanation.

²because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:

³Grace, mercy, and peace will be with ^εyou from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

⁴I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.

⁵And 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.

⁶This 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.

⁷For 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.

⁸Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.

⁹Whoever 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.

¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;

¹¹for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

¹²Having many things to write to you, I did not wish *to do so* with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

¹³The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen. (2 John 1:1-13. NKJV)

3 John is about the same length and I will read it now as well:

¹The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:

²Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

³For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth *that is* in you, just as you walk in the truth.

⁴I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in ^εtruth.

⁵Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren ^εand for strangers,

⁶who have borne witness of your love before the church. *If* you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well,

⁷because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.

⁸We therefore ought to receive ^εsuch, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

⁹I wrote to the church, but Diotrophes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.

¹⁰Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.

¹¹Beloved, 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.

¹²Demetrius has a *good* testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.

¹³I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink;

¹⁴but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name. (3 John 1:1-14. NKJV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

These letters would have been read aloud by one of the Elders, in the case of the 3 John, it would have been Gaius himself, before the assembled church on Sunday morning. Think on that as we draw out the four principle concerns represented in these epistles.

Principle Concerns:

1. Maintain the tension between truth and love

John is very concerned to remind these two churches that they must strive diligently to live always between the two great poles of Christian life, those poles being truth and love. We see that very clearly in both letters. Look again at the introduction or salutary section of 2 John:

¹The 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**, ²**because of the truth** which abides in us and will be with us forever:

³Grace, 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**. ⁴I rejoiced greatly that **I have found some of your children walking in truth** (2 John 1:1-3. NKJV)

There is a bit of a theme developing, quite obviously. Then he says to all of these truth lovers; I have a command for you that is very important, are you ready for it?

love one another. (2 John 1:5. NKJV)

And he defines love, not as a matter of sentiment or affection only, rather he defines it right in line with how the Old Testament in Leviticus 19 defined it:

⁶This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. (2 John 1:6. NKJV)

Love in the Bible is not an emotion, it is not a sentiment it is not an orientation, it is a disciplined commitment to keep the Law of God believing and trusting that this is the best way to love God and other people. Think about the 10 Commandments. Keeping the first 5 will ensure that you love God. Keeping the second 5 will ensure that you love other people. People feel loved when you do not kill them, sleep with their wives, steal their stuff, lie to them or about them or hate them because they have more money than you. People really like that. They feel well cared for when you refrain from doing those things. Jesus of course taught us to go deeper than the negative restrictions of the law, he said, if you really want to love someone, don't just not kill him, pray for him and bless those who persecute you. If you really want to love someone, don't just not sleep with his wife, don't even look at his wife with lust in your heart. If you really want to love someone, don't just not take his stuff, give him your stuff! If you want to love someone, don't just not lie about him, tell him the truth, have the courage to rebuke him to save him from error and sin. And if you really want to love someone don't just not envy him for his good life, share your good life with him, share with him the life of the kingdom of God, that's how you love people; you keep the commandments!

Evangelicals don't always talk charitably about the law anymore and that needs to stop. The New Testament teaches that the Law doesn't save us and never did, but it does not therefore conclude that the Law has no value, far from it. The Law teaches us our need of a Saviour, the Law teaches us the character of God and the Law functions to restrain evil and the wounding of other people. Those are three very good reasons to respect the Law of God.

A good church, according to John, is a church that works very hard to steward the truths they have been entrusted with and that works very hard to keep the law so that they are loving towards God and one another. Before we move on to John's second principle concern let me say a word about stewarding truth.

The attitude of the New Testament authors toward truth and the stewardship of it is very uniform, meaning it is the same with Paul, John, Jude, Peter etc. Truth is not something to be added to or developed, it is something to be stewarded and walked in. Truth is like a baton that is handed off from one generation to another, it is not like a book that we all add a chapter to. That means that

the hand off is absolutely critical. Near the end of this sermon we'll talk about the importance of promoting some teachers and demoting others, but for now just look at the back of the page where your sermon notes are taken and you will see a recommended book called "The Old Evangelicalism" by Iain Murray. Read that book. Murray is a historian of Evangelicalism and was once the Associate Pastor to Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones. He talks about how the old truths that were characteristic of the first generation of English speaking Evangelicals have been constantly under assault and always in danger of slipping away only to be recovered during times of revival. The revivals of Whitfield and Edwards did not usher in new truths to the Evangelical church, they recaptured OLD TRUTHS – the truths of Bunyan and Owen and Baxter and Knox and Calvin. The revival of Spurgeon did not usher in new truths, but it too reintroduced the truths of Edwards and Whitfield and Bunyan and Owen and Baxter and Knox and Calvin. The powerful ministry of Lloyd Jones was not due to NEW TRUTHS, rather it dug again the wells of the fathers and it found in those wells the same fresh water that had been there all the while. We need that again in our day. We used to believe that TRUTH CLAIMS were of eternal significance. I told you a few weeks ago that our forefathers believed that saving faith had three very important components: content + assent + desire. Today we tend to only talk about assent and desire, in times of dead legalism they tend to only talk about content and assent, but if you leave any part of this equation out, what do you have? Non-saving faith; dead faith. That is what we have today in most of what used to be called Evangelicalism. We have content-less faith and what is that? Unsaving faith.

We need to reclaim the old truths of the Old Evangelicals, we need fewer books on what colour of carpet is most welcoming to new comers and more books on the essence of the Gospel. We need fewer books on how pastors should dress and on how members can succeed in the workplace and more books on sin and righteousness and justification. We need the old truths. Those truths are not discovered or downloaded or developed through discussion, they are dug up afresh from old wells, amen? Amen.

2. Beware of deceivers and of heresies

He says for example in 2 John 1:7ff:

⁷For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh....

¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;

¹¹for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (2 John 1:7-11. NKJV)

We mustn't think that everyone who steps into a Christian pulpit or writes a book that is published by Zondervan or IVP is a true witness to the Gospel. Many deceivers have gone out. I think we need to say those words aloud because as Canadians I really don't think we are inclined to believe that. Let's say together: Many deceivers have gone out. Of course they have. Jesus said that they would:

¹¹Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

¹²And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

¹³But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (Matthew 24:11-13. NKJV)

Notice that Jesus makes the same connection between the law and love as John is making here. When people stop understanding the role of the law in promoting love, the love of many will grow cold. He says that false prophets will rise up and deceive many. The inference seems to be that part of what these false prophets will do is erode respect for the law of God. They will talk to us about the red letter Gospel no doubt and the need to focus only on the Words of Jesus and to abandon the Old Testament with all of its wrath and blood and primitive rituals. They will think they are promoting love when in fact they will be destroying it. The Apostle Paul warned us that false teachers and heretics would arise within the church, in fact, he told the elders of this very church in Ephesus, the hub church where John is now pastoring:

²⁷For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

²⁸Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church ^fof God which He purchased with His own blood.

²⁹For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

³⁰Also **from among yourselves** men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

³¹Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (Acts 20:27-31. NKJV)

Paul tells the elders in Ephesus that he taught them the whole counsel of God but that after him false teachers would arise who would not teach the whole counsel of God and he says that they will arise FROM WITHIN.

This is a very hard teaching for Canadians to receive. By and large Canadians want their pastors to speak in a uniformly positive way. We are the "can't we all just get along" people. Numerous

times over the course of my ministry here I have had well meaning brothers and sisters pull me aside and say: “Pastor, I just want you to know that I am one of your biggest fans, and I love it when you teach the hard truths – thank you for that. But I wish that you would not teach against some of what other teachers and churches are doing. Just stay positive. The negative stuff really doesn’t work in this context.” To which I generally reply: “I really don’t give a rip what works and what doesn’t. I have to answer to God for my work as a shepherd and this is part of the job description.

This passage also makes it clear that Christians, particularly leaders, are held accountable for who they affirm and endorse. In verses 10-11 of 2 John it is explicitly stated that if you appear to endorse these false teachers you will be held accountable for their errors. That is a staggering truth. Paul says much the same when he reminds Timothy not to ordain or lay hands on anyone hastily lest you share in their sins. We are responsible for who we endorse. I have felt pressed and burdened by this passage over the last year or so and I have been strongly rebuked in the Spirit because earlier in my ministry here I endorsed too many and too much and people were hurt by that. I wanted to be a nice guy, I wanted to build unity in the city and I got swept up in that and sheep got slaughtered. I repent of that and will be much more careful about who and what I appear to endorse in the future.

Now, we mustn’t become heresy hunters, but neither must we be so naive as to suppose that every church is a true church and every pastor a real pastor. To believe that is to deny the truthfulness of the Bible. The Bible says that there are many deceivers in our midst and the pastors in the Bible know this and warn their people accordingly.

3. Invest in good leaders

This third principle concern comes to the forefront in 3 John. Notice that John addresses this letter to an individual whereas 2 John is addressed to a whole church. John is unashamedly promoting Gaius. The letter is addressed to Gaius FOR THE CHURCH; who then do you think will read this letter aloud on Sunday morning? Gaius. John has just selected the preacher for this Sunday morning and he has also unselected Diotrephes, who we will talk about shortly. John is building up young Gaius. He is putting him forward and he is telling the church that they should likewise invest in faithful leaders. Look at verses 5-8 of 3 John:

⁵Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren ^fand for strangers,
⁶who have borne witness of your love before the church. *If* you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well,
⁷because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.
⁸We therefore ought to receive ^fsuch, that we may become fellow workers for the truth. (3 John 1:5-8. NKJV)

John has told them not to provide hospitality or assistance to false teachers but now he says that they should provide help, hospitality and investment to good leaders. The Bible makes it very clear that as the leaders go, so goes the church. Your readings a few weeks ago in Isaiah made that so clear:

Therefore the LORD will cut off head and tail from Israel, Palm branch and bulrush in one day.
¹⁵The elder and honorable, he *is* the head; The prophet who teaches lies, he *is* the tail.
¹⁶For the leaders of this people cause *them* to err, And **those who are led by them are destroyed**. (Isaiah 9:14-16. NKJV)

This is not to say that the health of the church depends entirely upon the elders and teachers, no the Bible makes it clear that you are responsible for the leadership that you have. You gather to yourselves teachers who tell you what you want to hear, Paul says that times will come when churches gather to themselves false teachers who will tickle their ears, so the Bible says we get the leadership we deserve, particularly in congregational churches like this where the people vote in their Senior Pastor and affirm at the AGM their Board of Elders. If this church goes to pot you won't be able to blame your pastor because you voted him in and you can fire him out. If this church falls into heresy and is rejected by the Lord you won't be able to blame your elders because you can affirm them or reject them on a yearly basis – its entirely up to you! Nobody gets an out clause. But the Bible says that over time, churches become according to the teachers and elders they affirm. You become what you listen and you become whom you submit to. So you better invest in good leaders.

This is why we have taken our time with the Senior Associate posting. As most of you know we got down to the wire with a candidate, we went all through the process last summer and we shut it down. We didn't feel like we had the right person and I would rather be short staffed for a year, or for 10 years, then put a leader over this flock that was not God's man. Now, by God's grace, this second time around we are being blessed and the process is going forward and we may have some good things to report in the future, but even still, if we don't feel like we have God's man, than we will shut it down. We will take very seriously the need to install good leaders in

this place. I believe that by God's grace we have assembled an excellent staff of teachers, leaders and ministry heads and we will steward those people and only add to them men and women of similar character and quality.

Similarly we take the development of our elders very seriously. We have a program here called the Barnabas Committee that seeks to develop over the long haul a qualified team of elder level leaders. We also take seriously the need to develop our young people who are exploring a call to ministry. You need to know that our church is heavily invested in several young people right now. Ryan Shevalier is preparing for a call to youth ministry out at Prairie Bible Institute. You should not forget about Ryan just because he's been away the last few years. He came to Christ here and received his call to ministry here and we are heavily invested in his education through the Titus Account. You are investing in Matt Koller who is pursuing a transition into ministry, you are investing in Jesse Stewart who is doing an internship here this summer, you are invested in Levi Denbok and also this morning you are meeting Greg Heywood for the first time, a student from Liberty University who is also pursuing a call to ministry. We take this very seriously here because we become who we listen to and we become who we submit to, therefore, we will invest in good leaders.

4. Identify bad leaders by name

John does not operate in veiled, vague, nameless references. He calls a spade a spade and he names names. Look at 3 John 1:9:

⁹I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.

¹⁰Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.

¹¹Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, ^fbut he who does evil has not seen God. (3 John 1:9-11. NKJV)

Remember now that this letter is being read aloud in church by Gaius. John has just pulled a power play, there is no doubt about it. It is obvious that Diotrephes has been promoting himself and trying to become the Chair of the Board or the Campus Pastor or whatever the title would have been and John just demoted him publically. Diotrephes was obviously suggesting that the church needed to be independent of John's authority and independent of Ephesus and that

perhaps he should be in charge and after all, wasn't he just as good a teacher as old John. John writes through one of the men he desires to promote and he puts Diotrephes on the bench hard. He says that he is coming, he will publicly declare Diotrephes' misdeeds, he says that the people are not to follow his evil example and he says that people who do evil like this are obviously not saved, they have not seen God. That is a serious smack down. It was public and it was by name.

Now again, Canadians hate this. Many times I've had well meaning folks tell me that its fine to warn people against the prosperity Gospel and the name it and claim it heresy but to actually name Joel Osteen and to reference his book is really not polite and not Christian even. "Aren't we all on the same team and aren't we to assume that if they're not against us they are for us? Isn't that the pattern of the Bible?" No, it really isn't. John had no problem saying: "This fellow who wants to be your leader and your teacher is evil and is not saved." Paul had no problem naming names and he had done it before in Ephesus. To this same mother church he had sent a letter to be read through a young man he wanted to promote and he named names. He had Timothy read these words to this same church:

¹⁸This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare,
¹⁹having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,
²⁰of whom are **Hymenaeus and Alexander**, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:18-20. NKJV)

Paul says: "I have blacklisted Hymenaeus and Alexander and I consider them heretics and blasphemers". That is huge! Do you think Paul was being strategic in having Timothy read those words to his church? You bet he was. He wanted those people to know that Timothy was a safe leader and these other men were wolves and false prophets. He named names. And you say: "Well the Apostle Paul was a brilliant theologian surely, but he was not always as nice as Jesus." Jesus was not that nice either. He had no problem pointing to a group of Pharisees and Sadducees and saying to his little flock:

"Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." (Matthew 16:6. NKJV)

Don't read their books, don't listen to their sermons, they are all a waste of time and worse, they are spiritual landmines, get to close to them and they'll take you down to hell with them. My friends, we never want to be nicer than Jesus. Jesus as the Good Shepherd, thought it very

important to warn his flock in the language of specificity about the dangers of false shepherds and blind guides. We will do no less in this place.

In your bulletin this week you will find a list of speakers and writes and preachers that are safe and trustworthy. These people need to be promoted in your hearing and in your reading. Likewise there is a list of people to be demoted in your hearing and in your reading. You may be offended that I would do this, but I am responsible for this before the Lord. If you chose to ignore these suggestions, that is fine, but as Paul said to the elders of this church in Ephesus: “I will not be guilty of your blood for I did not fail to warn you”.

My friends, we live in an age where men and women of faith must wake up to the fact that truth is under assault FROM WITHIN. We have our guns all trained on the enemy outside and we do not even realise that the we left the back door wide open and the enemy is inside, he is in our pulpits, he is writing our books and teaching our children. We need to wake up and we need to fight for the old faith. We need to dig again the wells of our fathers and drink the old water of revival and life. We need to cast out the voices of new and blasphemous nonsense and we need to promote, invest in and safeguard the leaders who serve us well. These are the concerns of John the Elder and we would do well to heed them. Let me pray for us as the worship team comes to lead us.