

II John - Setting a Watch

I. Introduction

A. This morning Pastor Bob has the opportunity to share the Word with another church in Massachusetts, so as one of your provisional elders I was asked to fill the pulpit this morning

- a. Over the past year, I have participated with your church to uphold the idea of Biblical eldership
- b. So, the last time I had the opportunity to preach here, I preached on elders being worthy of double honor
- c. And, sporadically over the last several months, as I've been able to be here, I've been sharing Titus with you, looking at the importance, role and task of elders
- d. This morning, I want to continue in this theme, but I want to take a step back - elders are an integral and organic part of a local church - so what is a local church? What is a local church supposed to do? What is a local church supposed to look like? How should we interact with local churches?
- e. This morning, I want to consider some of these questions by looking at the book of II John - let's start by reading II John, if you want to follow along I believe it is on page _____ in the pew Bibles

B. At first glance, II John may not appear to be about the church - it is written to 'the elect lady and her children'

1. But, for several reasons, I believe that II John was written to a local church
 - a. John wrote five books of the Bible: the Gospel, the Revelation and three letters
 - b. The 1st letter was a very general letter, probably sent to many churches in Asia Minor
 - c. The 3rd letter was written to a specific person - the beloved Gaius, applying some of the truths of I John
 - d. The 2nd letter, which we are studying this morning - is addressed less specifically, to the elect lady
2. Since John did not use a specific name, I believe that the elect lady is the church
 - a. The church is referred to as the Bride of Christ throughout the New Testament
 - b. John does this in Revelation 19:7-8 - *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"---for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints*
 - c. Paul says in Ephesians 5:30-31 - *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."* This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.
 - d. The church is the bride of Christ - if Christ is Lord, then the church is His chosen lady, the elect lady
3. But, John isn't writing to the church generally, the universal church, he is writing to a specific local church
 - a. We see this because John talks about other elect ladies
 - b. In verse 13 he says - the children of your elect sister greet you
 - c. There is one bride, but on earth, Christ's bride is present in many manifestations, local churches
 - d. John is part of one of these local churches and writes to another local church, sending greetings
4. The elect lady is the local church and her children are members of that church - John writes to the local church and her members

C. This helps explain why John doesn't introduce himself as John or as the Apostle, but as the Elder

1. John is writing to the local church as someone who cares about the local church, someone who loves the local church, someone who works to build up the local church
2. Church history tells us that near the end of his life, John was probably in Ephesus working and teaching at the local church there, likely as an elder in the local church at Ephesus
3. John is an Apostle, and as an Apostle, his words have authority, but he wants us to read this book not merely as from one who has apostolic authority but from one who cares for the local church as an elder

D. This morning I want to consider what John wants us to learn about the local church

1. Specifically, I want to ask John what the purpose of the local church is?
2. And then I want to ask John what should the local church look like in order to fulfill its purpose?
3. Finally, we'll ask John what we should do to participate in the local church well
4. Let's start with the purpose of the local church:

II. The purpose of the local church is love (to show Christ well)

A. The central command of II John is for the church to love each other

1. The apostle John is known as the apostle of love, and for good reason
2. The central exhortation of his gospel and his first letter is love
3. And the trend continues in II John as well - the central exhortation of the book comes in verse 5 - *And now I ask you, dear lady---not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning---that we love one another.*
4. John says that the local church's main mission, the local church's purpose, is to love each other well

B. So John upholds love throughout the entire letter

1. John begins his letter by declaring his love for the local church, verse 1 - *The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth,*
2. And then he continues, saying that all who know truth love the church - *and not only I, but also all who know the truth,*
3. And, most importantly, John says that this love is rooted in Jesus Christ, verse 3 - *Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.*

C. This is why love is the central purpose of the church - because love flows from Christ

1. The church is Christ's chosen lady because Christ demonstrated infinite, sacrificial love to win the church as His bride, Ephesians 5:25-27 - *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*
2. If Christ won the church through His sacrificial love, then the church should reflect that sacrificial love as they look at Christ, our love flows from Christ's love as John says in I John 4:19-21 - *We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*
3. If Christ loved us, we should be full of love, so Christ Himself said that love demonstrates that we truly belong to Christ, John 13:35 - *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*
4. Love is central to the church because Christ is central to the church, the church is founded on Christ and must reflect His love well

D. So the local church should be marked by sacrificial love that flows from and imitates Christ

1. Paul says it plainly in Ephesians 5:2 - *live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*
2. When we love each other well, we demonstrate that we belong to Christ; when we love each other well, we show each other and the world who Jesus Christ is
3. And this is the purpose of the church, to show Christ well by loving each other well, loving each other with a love that imitates Christ, a sacrificial and unconditional love
4. When we set aside our rights, our privileges and our desires in order to serve and to love other members in our local church, we show them and we show the world who Jesus Christ is - we show Christ well!
5. So, as a local church, we should be striving for this, we should be looking for ways to set aside our rights and our desires, we should be looking for ways to serve each other in love, we should be looking for ways to have genuine fellowship with each other to encourage each other in Christ

E. But, this isn't the only purpose John gives the local church

1. John says that the purpose of the local church is love - to show Christ well
2. But he also says that the purpose of the local church is truth - to know Christ well

III. The purpose of the local church is truth (to know Christ well)

A. The central command of II John may be love, but John's overwhelming emphasis in II John is truth

1. Listen to how many times John emphasizes truth in the first few verses
 - a. In verse 1, John loves in truth - *The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth,*
 - b. In verse 1, all who know truth love the church - *and not only I, but also all who know the truth,*
 - c. In verse 2, truth is the basis of love - because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:
 - d. In verse 3, love flows from Jesus Christ - *Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.*
 - e. In verse 4, the members of the local church are walking in truth - *I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.*
2. The repetition of this word tells us what John's burden is in II John, John wants the church to uphold the truth

B. And John tells us what truth the church should be upholding

1. In verse 7, he says - *For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.*
2. Deceivers, that is, those who don't uphold truth, are those who deny who Jesus Christ is
3. So the truth that the church must uphold is the truth about Jesus Christ, the truth of the gospel

C. The purpose of the local church is to uphold, remember and preserve the truth of Jesus Christ for all generations

1. So, as Larry read in I Timothy 3, the church is the '*pillar and the buttress of the truth*'
2. And the church trains up leaders so that the truth will be handed down in the church, as Paul tells Timothy in II Timothy 2:2 - *and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*
3. So the leaders of a local church must devote themselves to defining and defending the truth, as Paul tells Timothy in II Timothy 4:1-5 - *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

D. The truth is important because the truth is about Jesus Christ who is truth

1. Jesus Christ claimed that all truth belongs to Him because He is the truth in John 14:6 - *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*
2. And Jesus Christ brought truth into the world, John 1:17 - *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*
3. So Paul refers to the gospel, the message about Jesus, as the truth in Christ, II Corinthians 11:10 - *As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia.*
4. And, as we speak truth, we grow into Christ, Ephesians 4:15 - *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*
5. If the church belongs to Jesus Christ, if the church is the bride of Christ, then the church must know Christ, so the truth about Jesus Christ is of ultimate importance, knowing who Jesus Christ is must be at the core of every local church
6. The church must know who Jesus Christ is so the purpose of the local church is truth, to know Christ well!

E. So the local church has two purposes, truth and love, and these two purposes are related

1. In fact, these two purposes must always be fulfilled together, truth and love are always joined
2. Love without truth is nothing and truth without love is nothing
3. Love without truth is a false love, a love of falseness, a love that loves evil, a love that loves destruction
4. Truth without love is a false truth, a truth that doesn't represent Christ, a truth that isn't about Christ
5. So, remember this, the purpose of the local church is truth AND the purpose of the local church is love
6. The church must know Christ well so that the church can show Christ well

IV. But there is a danger that the church must watch for

A. This is why John is writing a letter to the local church reminding the church of its purpose

1. So John says in verse 7 - *For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.*
2. John reminds the church that its purpose is truth and love because there are many deceivers, many people who do not love the truth, who want to twist truth, who want to destroy truth, who want the church to forget who Jesus Christ is, those who express the spirit of the antichrist
3. Now, we could console ourselves by deciding that John is only talking about people outside the church - surely those outside the church don't love Christ and therefore don't love the truth
4. But, John is warning the local church that many deceivers will try to infiltrate the local church, will try to make them forget the truth about Jesus Christ
5. The church must remember its purpose because the world will do its best to make the church forget its purpose, to forget who Jesus Christ is and therefore not demonstrate who Jesus Christ is to the world

B. But John also tells us what to do about this danger, we must set a watch to guard the truth

1. Verse 8 - *Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.*
 - a. If the truth is so important then the truth must be guarded, so John tells us that we must set a watch
 - b. And John tells us what we are to be guarding when we set the watch - we guard the truth about Jesus Christ - *everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God.*
2. First, we must set an internal watch - the church must guard itself from falling away from the truth
 - a. Vs. 8 - *Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.*
 - b. The command 'watch' is a command to a group - we are to be watching over each other to make sure that we don't lose the truth inside the church - we need to set a guard over each other for the truth
 - c. It is the same concept found in Hebrews 12:15 - *See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;*
 - d. Or a few verses early in Hebrews 10:24-25 - *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*
 - e. If we don't set this watch, we may very well lose the truth, we may slowly and subtly forget the truth about Jesus Christ and we may lose our grasp of Christ and thereby lose our reward in Christ
 - f. We need to be watching, to be admonishing, to be encouraging and exhorting, to be stirring each other up in the truth so that no one fails to obtain the grace of Christ and so the truth is not lost
3. Second, we must set an external watch - the church must guard itself from promoting false teaching
 - a. Verse 10-11 - *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.*
 - b. Remember that John is writing to a church under the picture of an elect lady, so receiving a teacher into their house would be welcoming that teacher to come and join their church, to be in their fellowship
 - c. But, not only does he warn against allowing them to come into the church, he gives a sterner warning - don't even give them a greeting - which may signify promoting or welcoming a false teacher without necessarily enveloping them into the local church
 - d. The church must be very careful to define who is in the church and who the church should listen to because false teachers must be kept out - they don't know the truth, they aren't part of the truth and they don't teach the truth - they will deceive those who are naïve in the faith
4. So John exhorts the church to set a watch, even, as it were, to create a fortress to guard the truth
 - a. A commander establishes a fortress in order to guard something, and then a commander is going to assign soldiers to a fortress - those soldiers will be tasked with setting a watch and keeping watch to make sure that the fortress is guarded well
 - b. The soldiers need to encourage and sustain each other as they fight the enemy, and the soldiers will need to be very careful who they let into the fortress, they must man the walls to keep the enemy out
 - c. Just like an earthly commander, our commander, Jesus Christ, has set up a fortress for the truth - the local church, and He has appointed soldiers to guard those fortress - believers in a local church

V. How do we live out II John?

A. For our final point this morning, I want to ask, how do we practically obey the exhortation of this book?

1. As I've meditated on II John, I think there is one overarching application that it calls for - church membership
2. Sometimes as we look the Scripture, we might question whether church membership is really necessary - the words are not mentioned in the New Testament as such and there is no formula for how we should practice church membership, so sometimes we might think that church membership isn't really necessary
3. But I think II John teaches us why we need church membership - maybe it doesn't use those words, but it teaches those concepts - II John says we need to carefully guard each other and guard who is in the church so that we can guard the truth and testify to Christ well - we need to set a watch
4. So, the church needs a way to set a watch and to guard the truth - we need to set a watch that involves individuals in the church watching each other and elders as watch commanders guarding the fortress
5. This is what church membership is about - church membership, when practiced well, is carefully defining who knows the truth and who can represent the truth about Jesus both inside and outside the church
6. Church membership, when practiced well, is a covenantal relationship with each other where we encourage and stir up and guard and exhort one another in love to make sure we don't lose the truth about Christ
7. So, in applying II John, we see that the concepts of church membership are important to a local church - we need some way to define who is part of the church and represents Jesus Christ and who is not, we need a way to set a watch over the church to keep truth in and to keep falsehood out
8. And, I think II John teaches us three two about church membership: purpose and practice

B. The Purpose of Church Membership - Guarding the Truth

- a. John has taught us that truth is of preeminent importance, but it is in danger, and so it must be guarded
- b. And John exhorts the church not to receive false teachers into their house or even to give them a greeting
- c. So, unless we want to literally wall off the church, we need to have a way of clearly describing who is part of our church and who is not part of our church, we need to guard who represents the truth
- d. Church membership helps us to guard the truth as John exhorts us, because it declares who is able to represent the truth about Jesus Christ. As Jonathon Leeman says - *A church member, therefore, is someone who is formally recognized as a Christian and a part of Christ's universal body. That's not to say that churches always get it right, but it's their job to identify and affirm who belongs to the kingdom and who does not... Membership is the church's affirmation that you are a citizen of Christ's kingdom and therefore a card-carrying Jesus Representative before the nations.*
- e. We need some form of church membership to describe who is in the truth and knows the truth about Christ - the church needs to know Christ well so that it can show Christ well and church membership defines who knows Jesus Christ

C. The Practice of Church Membership - Loving One Another

- a. It is no accident that II John, the book about guarding the truth, is also strongly focused on love - if we are to set a watch, especially an internal watch, it has to be done by loving one another earnestly and truly
- b. This is because church membership is an activity, not a status - when we talk about guarding the truth and defining who is inside the church and who is not, we might be drawn into the opposite thinking - that church membership is merely a status, I have joined a church, I have my membership
- c. But it is really the opposite - in joining a local church we become part of the watch - John tells us in verse 8 'watch yourselves,' a continuing activity and he tells us how to do that in another command in verse 5 'that we love one another' - membership in a local church means taking the responsibility to love each other well
- d. We love each other by speaking the truth in love, by bearing each other's burdens, by encouraging one another, by stirring one another up to love and good works - activities that constitute watching each other
- e. Your church has tried to describe these acts of love in your membership covenant, but I think one statement catches the purpose - *We will walk in a spirit of Christian love in the congregation.*
- f. Church membership is not merely a declaration, it is an action - watching each other in love
- g. I think that our picture of a fortress actually helps us here - by joining a church we are staffing a fortress, and as fellow soldiers guarding the truth, we need to have camaraderie with each other, we need to be 'brothers in arms' having care and concern for each member of our unit as we protect the truth about Jesus Christ

VI. Three Exhortations to Three People

1. Exhortation 1: To current church members - watch one another in love

- a. As we meditate on the truths from II John, this is what I want to leave you with - church membership is important so we should be living out our membership in local churches by loving each other well
- b. Our interaction with each other should be intentional for the purpose of spurring each other on in the gospel in order to watch each other - so take your membership covenant seriously, try hard to live out what you have covenanted to do - make sacrificial love the pattern of your life as you imitate Christ
- c. Seek to have intentional and honest fellowship with each other so you can love and know each other well
- d. Seek to purposefully guide your conversations with each other to encourage one another in Christ
- e. We should be asking each other questions like: how has the gospel affected you this week? How has the gospel caused you to live differently this week? How have you struggled to live in the gospel this week? How can I encourage you in the gospel right now?
- f. We need to be seeking real, close fellowship with each other and being part of real spiritual conversations with each other because we need to love each other and to watch each other - you can't love and watch each other if you don't know each other well
- g. So, my exhortation to you is to take this seriously - watch one another in love

2. Exhortation 2: To Christians who are not members of a local church - join a local church

- a. Now, I know that there are seasons of time when a true Christian may not be a member of a local church, because of transition or a move or other factors that occur from time to time
- b. But, this should not be the habitual or continuing state of a Christian - going back to our illustration of a guarded fortress - a Christian who refuses to join a local church is like a soldier who refuses to join a unit - a soldier that claims that he is a member of the army and therefore does not need to join a squad or a platoon
- c. As some of our veterans here this morning could tell you, that does not make a good soldier - a good soldier is one who is a member of a specific unit, who dedicates himself to that unit, who cares for and protects the other members of that unit - being a member of a unit doesn't detract from being a member of the army, being a member of a unit is how a soldier is a member of the army
- d. John wants Christians to join together in local churches for the purpose of displaying and guarding the truth, for the purpose of loving and watching one another so that the truth of Jesus will be clearly preserved
- e. So, if you are not a member of a local church, I would exhort you to seek to find a church that you can join, a church that you can be part of the watch, a church where you can wholeheartedly love one another

3. Exhortation 3: To those who are not Christians, who are not in Christ - come learn about Jesus with us

- a. This morning I have talked about the need of clearly defining who is in the church and who is not, to clearly define what the truth is about Jesus and to keep those who don't teach that truth out
- b. And maybe this morning you are feeling a little isolated, feeling like you don't belong - and that is true, the church is a community of people who know and love Jesus Christ and only those who truly know and love Jesus Christ can be a part of our community
- c. But, we guard the truth and carefully define our community not because we want to keep you out, but because we want to keep the truth in, we want to make sure that everyone can clearly see who Jesus is
- d. So, if you aren't a believer in Jesus Christ this morning, if you aren't a Christian, we want to welcome you into our midst, we want you to know Jesus and to love Jesus, we would love for you to be part of our community
- e. If you don't know Jesus this morning, if you don't know the truth about Jesus, then come ask one of us here this morning, we would all love to talk about Jesus with you and help you come to know Him
- f. We guard our church not because we want to keep you out, but because we want you to know Jesus, we want you to know what it means that Jesus died in your place, we want you to know what it means that Jesus rose again to life for you, we want you to know what it means that Jesus is your king, we want you to come and be a part of this community, the community that follows Jesus the king
- g. So, yes, if you are not a Christian, you are on the outside this morning, but we love you and we want you to be on the inside, so my exhortation to you is, come and learn about Jesus Christ with us