

The Epistles of John

Week 3: 2 John 4-6

The epistles of John are something of an enigma when considered together. Few books of the New Testament are more loved, memorized, or quoted than 1 John. On the other hand one is hard pressed to find any books of Scripture more ignored and taught less than 2 and 3 John.

Ben Witherington III

2 John 1-3

2 John 1–3 (ESV)

The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides 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 Father's Son, in truth and love.

2 John 4-6

2 John 4–6 (ESV)

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. 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. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.

2 John 4-6

The very first statement that's made in this declarative, rhetorical document (verse 4) should give us pause. "It gives me great joy to find that some of your children are walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us."

Does this mean John has met those in the church and some are walking in the truth and some are not?

OR

Does this mean that John has met some of those in the church and they are walking in the truth?

Commentators are split on this question.

2 John 4-6

“Walking in the truth” indicates that *truth is both what we believe and how we live. It is doctrine and duty, creed and conduct.* The wonderful Baptist preacher Vance Havner used to say: “What we live is what we believe. Everything else is just religious talk.”

*Truth is both
what we believe and how we live.
It is doctrine and duty,
creed and conduct.*

2 John 4-6

Verse 5 then gets this exhortation: *“And now, dear lady, I’m not writing to you a new command but one we’ve already had from the beginning. I ask that we keep on loving one another.”*

There’s some kind of breakdown in the relationship between the writer and the audience. Part of this is trying to work for reconciliation, both amongst the members of that congregation and between the author and the audience.

John says let us “love one another.” He does not launch a command in their direction but includes himself in the call to renewed interpersonal devotion. This is collegial or familial rather than bureaucratic appeal. He writes with authority and yet with a father’s or grandfather’s warmth

2 John 4-6

1 John 3:11 (ESV)

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

1 John 3:23 (ESV)

And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

John 13:34 (ESV)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

2 John 4-6

John 15:12 (ESV)

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

John 15:17 (ESV)

These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

1 Peter 1:22 (ESV)

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart

2 John 4-6

It has often been objected that we cannot be commanded to show an emotion such as love.

The objection is met by observing that Christian love is a matter of active caring for others rather than an emotional feeling.

1 Corinthians 13:1–7

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (ESV)

2 John 4-6

The second part of verse 6 has been described as “well-nigh incomprehensible”. Although there are challenges to grasping particular elements of it, the overall concern is evident.

The syntax of verse 6 leaves us wondering what the “it” which ends the verse refers to. Unfortunately the Greek is as obscure as the English

The ESV takes a noncommittal approach by leaving the verse as it is in the Greek - unclear.

“And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.”

2 John 5-6 Breakdown

Not a new commandment, one 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, you have heard from the beginning, you
should walk in it.

2 John 4-6

To find out what “it” refers to we must look at the context, all the way from verse 1 through verse 6.

Let’s look at the 5 translations we read during the week and see how they address this conundrum.

From the context, we have three choices. It refers to:

1. Truth
2. Love
3. Both

2 John 4-6 - Conclusions

1. False theology (the lack of truth) never just has theological implications; it always has ethical (behavioral) consequences, so our author is worried about not just belief but behavior, because they're intertwined.
3. It's a package deal. If you have the Son properly and understand Him and believe in Him truly, you have the Father. If you don't have the Son, you have neither.
5. We can begin to see what trouble in paradise looks like, and it has to do with both theology and ethics, both belief and behavior

Application for This Week

Think about how tightly the two words “truth” and “love” are tied together in 2 John 1-6.

- Each word is used several times in these few verses
- There is word interplay between these two so that it is very apparent that they are both essential and that they both interrelate.
- Truth can not be separated from love in John’s eyes
- Love can not be separated from truth in John’s eyes

Does my life reflect this in both word and deed?

Homework

John McArthur has said that he reads each book of the Bible 30 times before he begins to study it in preparation for teaching it. I'd like us to all read 2 John just one time per day this coming week to prepare for next week.

Read one translation of 2 John each day this week. It takes less than 2 minutes. Go slowly and think about what is being said.

Write down any questions or things you'd like to discuss in class next week on the first page or email them to me.

Thank you for coming!

See you next week