

2 John

Hymns: #101 It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

- 1) **V.1-3** *“The elder, 2To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth--and not I only, but also all who know the truth-- because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: 3Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.”*
- a) This letter has traditionally been thought to have been written by the Apostle John, though he is not specifically mentioned. It is said to have come from “the elder”. Though the term elder- “presbuteros” is an office in the Church, this is most likely an affectionate term by which John was known to his hearers.
- i) This is the same John who wrote the Gospel of John, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John and the book of Revelation. In Ken Johnson’s book, “The Ancient Church Fathers”, he explains how after the death of the Roman Emperor Domitian in 96 AD, John was freed from his exile to the isle of Patmos, then “John went back to the Asian capital Ephesus and set it up as a headquarters for missionary activity. John and his disciple Polycarp, sent out missionaries and planted churches for over twenty years. John died there of old age during the time of Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117)”.¹
- (1) So this gives us some indication of the widespread knowledge of the Apostle John as “The elder”.
- b) It has been debated as to who this letter was addressed to. Some students of the bible see “the chosen lady and her children” as an un-named, but literal woman (perhaps a widow) and her children. Others understand this to be a literary form by which a particular church was personified as a chosen lady and her children; like “the daughter of Zion” or “the Bride of Christ”. Still others think it was both a specific lady and a house church in her home; like “Nympha and the church in her house” (Col. 4:15).
- i) Personally I tend to agree with Zane Hodges who said “While the possibility that a particular Christian woman is addressed cannot be totally excluded, it is preferable to treat the letter as addressed to a church...If this letter were written to an actual Christian woman, one would expect the greetings (at the end of verse 13) to come from her sister, not her sister’s children.”²
- c) The word “truth” is used four times in just the first three verses of his address which should give us an immediate indication as to John’s purpose; namely that there was the threat of “error” by false teachers confronting this particular church.
- i) “John was not one to say that all religious teachings are true in one way or another, and that we should not be critical just as long as people are sincere. To John, there was a great difference, in fact a deadly difference, between truth and error; and he would not tolerate error.”³
- 2) **V.4-6** *“4 It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. 5And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. 6And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.”*
- a) Here again, we see a particular word used four times in just two verse; the word “command”. While “truth” can be broad and perhaps even vague to us at times, “commandments” blow away all vagaries. Commandments bring into sharp focus the truth regarding specific areas of our lives.

¹ Ken Johnson; “Ancient Church Fathers”; 2010; p.8

² Zane Hodges; 2 John; The Bible Knowledge Commentary; Dallas Theological Seminary; Victor Books, 1983; pp. 905;909

³ Warren Wiersbe; Be Alert; Victor Books; 1987 (p. 103)

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- b) The commandment John gives is that we love one another and that we walk in love. And he also makes the “how to love” crystal clear: “And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands.”
- i) John is clearly stating that Love is synonymous with a life of obedience; a life that walks in the full body of revealed truth in God’s word.
- (1) Far too many people deceive themselves, and others in the process, by replacing God’s definition of love with their own. Biological family loyalties; fear of man; not wanting to be seen out of step with the hip and current lingo and priorities of the world are just a few of the usual suspects driving their false definition of love.
- (a) But “A Christian who truly seeks God’s best for his brothers can only do so by obeying what God has commanded him to do. Love undirected by God’s revealed will may easily degenerate into unwise, sentimental activity.”⁴
- ii) This is not the first time John has mentioned this. Look back at 1 John 5:2-3 where we read “This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3This is love for God: to obey his commands.”
- (1) This passage focuses the truth on obedience. Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbour, and here John explicitly declares that we can do neither apart from obedience to his commands. That simply means DO WHAT HE SAYS. I want to urge you to ask yourself 3 questions:
- (a) Do you really love others...according to God’s definition? I can biblically say that the degree to which you and I walk in disobedience to God, is the degree to which you and I don’t really love others.
- (b) Ask yourself a question? Is it really “loving” (according to God’s definition) to the person who is in bondage to sin, for the church, a leader or any member, to disobey God by either not telling them truth or going along with their sinful behaviour? Clearly not. But, this is happening in spades across Christendom in this city and the world.
- (c) The question is “Will you love...according to God’s definition?”
- c) The last half of verse six in the Greek literally reads: “As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in **“IT”**.”
- i) What is the IT? In context here, the “it” is that which you have heard from the beginning. In other words, John is saying to this church that the form of apostolic teaching they received from him in the beginning, they are to hold onto and walk in. They are to ignore the new form of teaching that the false teachers are peddling.
- 3) **V.7** *“Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.”*
- a) Once again the Greek is instructive to us here when we see this verse actually begins with the word “Because”. It ties verse 6 and 7 together. **Because** many deceivers have gone out into the world, hold onto the original form of apostolic teaching you received. Present day application might sound like this: Because of the current trend towards normalizing homosexuality and same-sex marriage by many churches and leaders, you stay grounded in the Bible; the Bible which they have abandoned.
- b) It seems that each age or generation is threatened with a particular expression of unbiblical error. Right now it’s SSM and the LGBTI agenda creeping into the churches. But in John’s day the heresy he was fighting was that false teachers were going around teaching a denial of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

⁴ Zane Hodges; 2 John; *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*; Dallas Theological Seminary; Victor Books, 1983; pp. 907

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- i) In John's day the broad category of heresy that was threatening the churches was that of Gnosticism. Gnosticism broadly held that the body was either amoral, so it didn't matter what you did with your body or else it was even evil, in which case they taught extreme forms of asceticism and harsh treatment of the body.
- ii) A particular form of Gnosticism which originated in the schools of Alexandria was what is called Docetism. Docetism taught people that the incarnation was but an appearance and that Christ didn't really come in the flesh. He was not really a man.
 - (1) (A side note: The Alexandrian school of thought emphasised the deity of Jesus over His humanity. The Antiochan school of thought emphasised the humanity of Jesus over his deity. This heresy became known as Nestorianism. Both of these heresies were not finally put to death until 325 at the Council of Nicaea and 451 at the Council of Chalcedon where the nature of the Trinity and Christ's nature was dogmatically articulated.)
- iii) We see in this verse that many deceivers (plural) have gone out into the world denying the full humanity and the full deity of Jesus Christ in coming to us through the Incarnation and Virgin Birth. The second half of the verse says literally "This is the deceiver (singular) and the antichrist." In other words, the corporate expression of the many is the singular work of the one deceiver Satan as the one who will in the end be embodied in THE Anti-Christ.
 - (1) Rev. 13:2-4 "And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. 3One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. 4Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?""
- iv) John explained this in detail back in 1 John 2 and 4
 - (1) 1 John 2:18-22 "Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. 19They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. 20But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. 21I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. 22Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist--he denies the Father and the Son."
 - (a) Note John says these many false teachers went out from "us" and did not really belong to "us". "The word "us" here is most naturally taken as the apostolic first person plural"⁵ meaning John and the other foundational apostles. John's "point was that these men did not really share the spirit and the apostolic circle...Heresy in the Christian church whether on the part of its saved members or unsaved people in it, always unmask a fundamental disharmony with the spirit and doctrine of the apostles. A man in touch in touch with God will submit to apostolic instruction."⁶ Simply put, false teachers and their follows no longer believe in or submit to the authority of the Bible.
 - (2) 1 John 4:1-3 "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the

⁵ Zane Hodges; *1 John; The Bible Knowledge Commentary; Dallas Theological Seminary; Victor Books, 1983; pp. 891*

⁶ *ibid*; pp. 892

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world. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”

(a) The apostolic teaching of Scripture commands us to test the spirits, which is the spirit of people who assume a teaching role with the churches. One of the tests people could have employed in John's day would have been to ask the question, “What do you think about Christ? Is he God come in the flesh?” This is always a good question even today. But perhaps a more immediate question for us to test the spirits might be “What do you think about the Bible? Is SSM and homosexuality biblical?” Be prepared if you do. You may be surprised by the answer you get.

4) V.8-9 “*8 Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. 9 Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.*”

a) John reminds and warns us of the reality of reward or loss to be found at the Bema Seat Judgement of Christ. He doesn't want anyone to lose what they have “worked for”. Clearly he is not speaking about our salvation for that cannot be worked for nor can it be lost once possessed. John wants us to be “fully rewarded”. John felt some true believers were in danger of losing some of the rewards they had worked for because they were “running ahead and by not abiding in the true teaching of Christ”.

i) Running ahead here means to get out in front of or go beyond what is written in the Scriptures and move into areas of speculation. To run ahead of what God has written is to leave God behind; thus the one who does this does not have God. However, the one who abides within the boundaries of the Bible has both the Father and the Son with Him in fellowship.

(1) We saw this back in 2 Peter Chapter 1 where we discovered the safeguarding Apostolic Voice which says “Remember”. You know false teachers rarely do this. They don't say look back and remember what the Apostles taught in the Bible. Rather, they are most often out in front with something new and exciting to say...they happily wear the mantle of being “progressives”. They don't bring that stuffy, old, fuddy-duddy stuff of Bible doctrines. They are “hip” and “with it” and have their “intentional” or “emergent” or “progressive” theology and practice.

(a) Warren Wiersbe comments on this saying: “‘Progressive Theology’ that denies Christ is not progressive at all; it is regressive- all the way back to Genesis 3:1- ‘Yea, hath God said?’...John was not condemning ‘progress’ as such. The Lord has yet more light to shine forth from His word. God gave us His Holy Spirit to teach us and to lead us into new understanding and application of the truth (John 16:12-16), and we must constantly grow (2 pet. 3:18). But if our ‘learning’ leads us away from the fundamental doctrines of the person and work of Jesus Christ, then we are on dangerous ground.”⁷

5) V.10-11 “*10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. 11 Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.*”

a) In John's day it was not uncommon for Christian teachers to travel and in doing so have to rely on local support and hospitality. We'll see this next week in 3 John. So the warning to this particular church and to us is to “test the spirits” and their teaching. If they don't hold to the Bible and Truth about Jesus, then we are not to offer them hospitality or even welcome them, literally we're not to even say “greetings”⁸. To do otherwise is to actually “share in their wicked work”.

⁷ Warren Wiersbe; Be Alert; Victor Books; 1987 (p. 113)

⁸ Zane Hodges; 2 John; The Bible Knowledge Commentary; Dallas Theological Seminary; Victor Books, 1983; pp. 908

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- i) James 4:4 "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God"
 - ii) 2 Cor. 6:14-18 "14Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."17"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."
 - iii) Eph. 5:6-7 "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 7Therefore do not be partners with them."
 - iv) 1 Cor. 15:33 "Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."
- b) Zane Hodges sums this up saying: "To the modern reader these instructions seem unduly rigid and harsh. A great part of the problem however, lies in the modern inclination to be highly tolerant of religious differences. One must frankly face the fact that the New Testament writers did not share this spirit of toleration. Their commitment to the truth and their consciousness of the dangers of religious error called forth many stern denunciations of false teachers. Not surprisingly, this modern age, having a diminishing sense of the dangers of heresy, has lost its convictions about truth...Even a word of greeting might tend to give them (that is false brethren or teachers) a sense of acceptance that could be misconstrued. The readers were to make plain from their aloofness that they in no way condoned the activities of these men. The same must be true today."⁹ How are you going with that?
- 6) **V.12-13** "12I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. 13The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.
- a) I can't help but wonder how much "joy" we are missing out on because we have to such a large measure exchanged "face to face" encounter for technology. It's not "paper and ink" with us, in fact that would be downright astonishing to even get a "paper and ink" letter from someone, but it's Facebook, SMS's. Tweets etc.
 - i) The dangers of this lack of face to face were keenly appreciated by one young man who was determined to win the affection of a certain young lady. He decided that the way to heart was through the mail, so he began writing her love letters. He wrote a love letter every day to this lady. Six, seven times a week she got a love letter from him. When she didn't respond, he increased his output to three notes every twenty-four hours. In all, he wrote her more than seven hundred letter. In the end she wound up marrying the postman!
 - ii) Face to face is important folks!
 - b) Let us not be afraid to be "old fashioned" particularly when it comes to the Bible and Christ; and perhaps we might even explore what more "face to face" time other believers might mean for the incomplete joy in our lives.
 - c) John closes with greetings from the "sister church" and the believers there with him.

⁹ Ibid.