

Session 5

August 13, 2023

SET APART IN THE WAY WE LIVE

2 John 1-9

John— “the disciple whom Jesus loved”—penned five books in the New Testament. Nestled between his first (the Gospel of John) and his last (Revelation) are three brief treatises, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. Of these, 1st John is well known, but with barely more than a dozen verses each, 2nd and 3rd John are not. But the simplicity and clarity of these letters makes up for their brevity. Like 1st John, these books make very clear distinctions between those who know Christ and those who do not. In this week’s lesson, three distinctives are highlighted.

Believers’ lives are characterized by truth (vv. 1-4). There is some debate as to the cryptic introduction. Who is this “elect lady?” And who are “her children?” While it certainly could refer to an actual woman, the most likely explanation is that the elect lady represents a specific church, and the children are its members. Perhaps the letter, which was almost certainly written from Patmos, was open to outside scrutiny and the prisoner in exile intentionally kept its recipient(s) vague. Five times in these first four verses, John used the word “truth.” Not simply the opposite of a lie, John uses the term to refer to doctrinal purity and a crystal-clear understanding of the hard lines that mark Christ-followers. The centrality of the theme is further emphasized by the modifiers used in each of the five instances. In verse 1, John *loves them in truth* and believers *come to know the truth*. In verse 2, *truth remains in us*, and *will be with us forever*. In verse 3, *grace, mercy, and peace will be with us in truth*; and in verse 4, children are *walking in truth*. That’s quite a lesson on truth for a letter that only contains 13 verses! For reflection: *Compare these four introductory verses to those found in 3rd John. What similarities exist? What are some of the differences?*

Believers’ lives are characterized by love (vv. 5-6). The exhortation in verse 5 is now addressed to the “dear lady.” This is more an interpretation than literal translation. The single word used in the Greek is the feminine form of the word for “lord.” It could be a proper name, but more likely is used by John as a show of both respect and affection toward the congregation addressed. The argument that follows moves from general to specific. The new command is not new at all (see I John 7ff), but like anything, its familiarity might render it insignificant over time. Hence the need for reminders. First, John states the basic command: *love one another* (v. 5). Then he defines the command. Loving means *keeping Christ’s commands* (v. 6; see also John 13:35 and John 14:15). Then he combines all the ideas: obey His commands; love one another; walk in love. Notice the continuity: believers don’t simply love one another and forget about it; they *walk together* in that love. For reflection: *In the New Testament, the term “Christian walk” is not specifically used. But the metaphor is clearly there! Do some study and see where this idea shows up and in what context the “walk” is used. What applications can we make?*

Believers’ lives are characterized by diligence (vv. 7-9). Here, John reminds the church that there has never been a shortage of false teachers intent on deceiving those seeking the truth. Three characteristics are mentioned. First, *they are among us*. John says there are *many*, and they have *gone out into the world*. Second, *they deny that God’s Son actually came in the flesh*. We need to remember that the most damaging heresies are those that distort or deny the deity of

Christ. The first century heresy known as Docetism (from the word “to seem like”) taught that Jesus—as God—could not have had a “real” human body. Therefore, it only *appeared* that He did. Third, *the false teachers are antichrist* (lit: “against Christ”). John used this terminology in 1 John 2:18 to remind believers that there was already a burgeoning host of opponents to Christ who foreshadowed *the* Antichrist who will arise during the Tribulation period (see Dan. 7:24ff; 2 Thess 2:3ff; Rev. 17:10, et al). John’s reminder to be diligent went two ways. First, he warned the church to stay true to the teachings of Christ. Second, he warned them not to “go beyond” those teachings by adding to them or looking for truth elsewhere (v. 9). For reflection: *What are some ways churches today might “go beyond” Christ’s teaching? Do you think there is pressure on the church to do that? Why?*