

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

Lesson Plan for Thursday – April 24, 2014

CONVERSATION #11 – “II JOHN”

Our objectives for this session:

- to share ideas, attitudes, and experiences relating to the message proclaimed by John; and, in doing so, strengthen our SAKLC fellowship;
- to view II JOHN as a personal letter; and, a further addition to John’s written concerns about the Gnostic heresy regarding *Christology*;
- to explore the possible presence of “*imposters*” in the modern church and discuss ways we can cope with that situation;
- to discuss what “*to love in truth*” really means.

OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER and SHARING GOD’S PEACE

FACILITATOR’S OVERVIEW OF II JOHN:

Three (3) important areas of consideration prior to looking at specific texts:

1. **AUTHORSHIP** - The writer of both 2 John and 3 John does not mention his name, but clearly both letters come from the same author; it is also highly probable that this is the same person responsible for writing 1 John. 2 John, however, is a personal letter, unlike 1 John. It has only 245 Greek words and is shorter than any other New Testament book except 3 John (*with only 219 Greek words*). The length of both 2 and 3 John is governed by the size of a single sheet of papyrus (reed paper) which would have measured about 8 by 10 inches. 2 John is written in a standard epistolary format characteristic of first century letters. It begins with an introductory formula (vv. 1-3), which mentions the sender and the addressee and includes a greeting. Many letters of this period followed the greeting with an expression of thanksgiving or a wish for the health of the addressee. Letters would normally end with a concluding formula which would often repeat the health wish and then include a word of farewell (*see 2 John 13*). A comparison, below, of 2 John 12, and 3 John 13-14, provides some evidence of common authorship:

- a) 2 John 12: *I have a lot to tell you. I don't want to use paper and ink, but I hope to visit you and talk with you face-to-face, so that our joy can be complete.*
 - b) 3 John 13-14: *I have a lot to say to you, but I don't want to use pen and ink. ¹⁴ I hope to see you soon, and we will speak face-to-face.*
2. **BACKGROUND** - The contextual setting of all three Epistles of John is similar. Each of John's letters deal with the same situation and the same people. As evidence, consider these examples below:
- a) 1 John 4:3 - *... and every spirit that doesn't confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and is now already in the world.*
 - b) 2 John 7 - *Many deceivers have gone into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ came as a human being. This kind of person is the deceiver and the antichrist.*
3. **ADDRESSEE** - "*The elect lady*" or "*the lady chosen by God*" probably means the church in one area. Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride. The apostle, Peter, wrote in a similar way:
- a) 1 Peter 5:13 - *The fellow-elect church in Babylon greets you, and so does my son Mark.*

A) COMPARING THE SCRIPTURAL RECORDS –II JOHN 1-3 – “AN INTRODUCTORY GREETING”

[COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATION] *From the elder. To the chosen gentlewoman and her children, whom I truly love (and I am not the only one, but also all who know the truth), ² because of the truth that remains with us and will be with us forever. ³ Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, will be ours who live in truth and love.*

[NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION TRANSLATION] - *The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth, ² because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever: 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.*

[THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE TRANSLATION] - *The elderly elder [of the church addresses this letter] to the elect (chosen) lady (Cyria) and her children, whom I truly love—and not only I but also all who are [progressively] learning to recognize and*

know and understand the Truth—² Because of the Truth which lives and stays on in our hearts and will be with us forever: ³ Grace (spiritual blessing), **mercy, and [soul] peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ** (the Messiah), **the Father’s Son, in all sincerity (truth) and love.**

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS PORTION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT:

Verses 1-2 - Just as in the First Epistle of John, and in the Gospel of John, the author does not explicitly identify himself with the Apostle John, so here he uses the designation **the elder**, meaning **“the aged one,”** to suggest that he is advanced in years. Presumably the Christian community to which he wrote knew who he was. The **elect lady and her children** refer to a particular local church at some distance from the community where the author is living at the time of writing. 2 John is being written to warn a “sister” congregation, some distance away, of the missionary efforts of the secessionist false teachers, and the dangers of welcoming them whenever they should arrive.

Two great Christian words are intimately associated here; they are **“love”** and **“truth.”** God’s truth teaches us the way we are to love. The **“truth”** the author is speaking of is *a manifestation of the Spirit* of truth himself, and is permanently with the believer, just as the *Spirit* is. For an interesting parallel see: John 14:16-17 **I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. ¹⁷ This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you.** Note, too, that a little earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus is defined as **“the way, truth and life”** (John 14:6).

Verse 3 - This form of greeting, while it fits the standard format of a first century (AD) letter, also contains a significant amount of reassurance for the readers – reassurance that would be needed in the face of the serious Christological challenge represented by the secessionist (*Gnostic*) opponents and their teaching.

B) COMPARING THE SCRIPTURAL RECORDS –II JOHN 4-6 – “LIVING BY LOVE”

I was overjoyed to find some of your children living in the truth, just as we had been commanded by the Father. ⁵ Now, dear friends, I am requesting that we love each other. It’s not as though I’m writing a new command to you, but it’s one we have had from the beginning. ⁶ This is love: that we live according to his commands. This is the command that you heard from the beginning: live in love. [CEB]

I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father. ⁵ But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, let us love one another. ⁶ And this is love, that we walk according to

his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning—you must walk in it. [NRSV]

I was greatly delighted to find some of your children walking (living) **in [the] Truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father** [Himself].
⁵ **And now I beg you, lady** (Cyria), **not as if I were issuing a new charge** (injunction or command), **but** [simply recalling to your mind] **the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.** ⁶ **And what this love consists in is this: that we live and walk in accordance with and guided by His commandments** (His orders, ordinances, precepts, teaching). **This is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning, that you continue to walk in love** [guided by it and following it]. [AMP]

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS PORTION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT:

Verse 4 - The author's statement that he has found some of the members of the Christian community to which he is writing **walking/living according to the truth** does not necessarily mean that he found some not walking in the truth. It simply means that the author does not have personal knowledge of all the members of the community to which he is writing. In the present situation the phrase **walking/living according to the truth** refers to genuine Christians who are holding fast to an apostolic Christology in the face of the secessionist (*Gnostic*) opponents' challenge to orthodoxy.

Verse 5 - 1 John 2:7 states virtually the same thing as the present verse, referring to a **new commandment** which the readers have had **from the beginning**. The new commandment (see John 13:34-35 and John 14:15) is that believers **love one another**. Obviously the church is divided into those who walk in love by the truth and those who do not. As in 1 John, in the midst of the ongoing conflict with the secessionist opponents, the necessity for genuine Christians to show love for fellow believers in obedience to the commandment to love one another is a matter of utmost urgency!

Verse 6 – Again, the author explains what **love** consists of, namely **obedience to God's commandments**. 1 John 5:3 says virtually the same thing. Genuine Christians express their love for God by obeying his commandments, and especially by loving one another.

C) COMPARING THE SCRIPTURAL RECORDS –II JOHN 7-8 – “BEWARE OF FALSE TEACHERS!”

Many deceivers have gone into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ came as a human being. This kind of person is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ **Watch yourselves so that you don't lose what we've worked for but instead receive a full reward.** [CEB]

Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the

antichrist! ⁸ *Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but may receive a full reward.* [NRSV]

For many imposters (seducers, deceivers, and false leaders) **have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge** (confess, admit) **the coming of Jesus Christ** (the Messiah) **in bodily form. Such a one is the imposter** (the seducer, the deceiver, the false leader, the antagonist of Christ) **and the antichrist.** ⁸ **Look to yourselves** (take care) **that you may not lose** (throw away or destroy) **all that we and you have labored for, but that you may** [persevere until you] **win and receive back a perfect reward** [in full]. [AMP]

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS PORTION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT:

Verse 7 - The expression **many deceivers/imposters** refers to the secessionist opponents described at length in 1 John (2:18-19; 4:1). Both in the congregation, and among the travelling prophets, there were those who denied that the Son of God truly had a human body. For these teachers they are to be on the lookout, and they are to reject their teaching! The content of the confession, **Jesus as Christ coming in the flesh**, is virtually identical to 1 John 4:2. The opponents are compared to the **Deceiver (Satan)** and the **Antichrist**.

Verse 8 - Some biblical scholars see this as a reference to faith itself being lost, but this involves assumptions about the possibility of apostasy and loss of eternal life for genuine Christians which are not reflected in John's other writings in the New Testament. Much more likely **the things we have worked for** refer to pastoral and missionary efforts undertaken by the recipients of the letter in their own community and surrounding communities. If the secessionist opponents with their false teaching are allowed to recruit unopposed in the community to which the author is writing, all the effective work accomplished up to this point by the recipients of the letter would be in danger of being lost.

D) COMPARING THE SCRIPTURAL RECORDS –II JOHN 9-11 –

“FALSE PROPHETS ARE NOT TO BE WELCOMED!”

Anyone who goes too far and does not continue in the teaching about Christ does not have God. Whoever continues in this teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ **Whoever comes to you who does not affirm this teaching should neither be received nor welcomed into your home,** ¹¹ **because welcoming people like that is the same thing as sharing in their evil actions.** [CEB]

Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

10 Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; 11 for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person. [NRSV]

Anyone who runs on ahead [of God] **and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ** [who is not content with what He taught] **does not have God; but he who continues to live in the doctrine** (teaching) **of Christ** [does have God], **he has both the Father and the Son.** ¹⁰ **If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine** [is disloyal to what Jesus Christ taught], **do not receive him** [do not accept him, do not welcome or admit him] **into** [your] **house or bid him Godspeed or give him any encouragement.** ¹¹ **For he who wishes him success** [who encourages him, wishing him Godspeed] **is a partaker in his evil doings.** [AMP]

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS PORTION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT:

Verse 9 - Here the opponents are described as “*progressives*” who have gone beyond what is warranted by the apostolic eyewitness testimony about Jesus. False teachers usually claim that they are the “*progressives*” or “*the advanced thinkers*”. Such persons do **not have God**, as opposed to those who **remain** in the apostolic teaching about Jesus and **have both the Father and the Son**. True Christians will progress and advance in the knowledge of God who became man, but they will not advance beyond this Christ. So there is to be no compromise with false teachers and prophets.

Verse 10 - The statement **do not receive him into your house** could simply be a prohibition against showing hospitality to the traveling representatives of the secessionist opponents. It is possible, though, that **the house** refers to a house church, in which case the author of 2 John is saying the opponents should not be given an opportunity as traveling teachers to speak to the house church and thus gain an opportunity to spread their false teaching. They are not to be given Christian hospitality. Only by keeping the church pure in her central doctrine will Christianity be preserved.

Verse 11 - Giving one of the opponents’ representatives a **greeting** in public could be construed by bystanders or observers as giving endorsement to their heterodox views about who Jesus is. To give the appearance of condoning the teaching of one of the opponents’ representatives might advance his cause or imply acceptance of his false Christology. This would be, in effect, to **share...in his evil deeds**.

E) COMPARING THE SCRIPTURAL RECORDS –II JOHN 12-13 – “PLANS TO VISIT’

I have a lot to tell you. I don't want to use paper and ink, but I hope to visit you and talk with you face-to-face, so that our joy can be complete. ¹³ *Your chosen sister's children greet you.* [CEB]

Although I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink; instead I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. ¹³ *The children of your elect sister send you their greetings.* [NRSV]

I have many things to write to you, but I prefer not to do so with paper and ink; I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. ¹³ *The children of your elect (chosen) sister wish to be remembered to you. Amen (so be it).* [AMP]

Verse 12 - The author indicates he has much more to say, but prefers to do so in person (*face to face*) rather than *with paper and ink*. Letters sometimes cannot achieve what a “face to face” talk can achieve. John recognized this and therefore wanted to meet the church members personally.

Verse 13 - “*The children of your sister*” are probably members of the church from which John writes; these final greetings remind us that the church is the whole family of God!

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION:

1. What does “*to love in truth*” really mean? Can we think of practical examples?
2. In the context of a nation, it is often true that emergency regulations can make for bad law. Do you regard the advice of vs. 10–11 as emergency regulations and bad law?
3. It has been said that “*one way to destroy your enemies is to make them friends!*” How can one make false teachers who are enemies of the Gospel into friends of the Gospel?
4. Is it true that more can be achieved by a personal encounter rather than by writing many letters or making several phone calls?

NEXT THURSDAY, MAY 1, 2014 – OUR FINAL CONVERSATION on III John