

"Bolt the Door / Open the Door"

John 2, John 3
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Well, we've come to the end of another year of Bible study. Congratulations for sticking with it! You remember when we started back in September, I reminded you about the purpose of each of the four gospels: Matthew was writing to the Jews and mainly concerned with expressing Jesus' regal rights to the throne of David. He was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. Matthew wanted to convince the Jews of that.

The theme of Mark's gospel was to show the Romans and the Gentile missionary field the servanthood of Jesus. It moves from action to action, from one snapshot to the next, showing Jesus as a servant and His heart to serve.

Luke, a physician, was writing to the Greeks and showing the humanity of Jesus. His favorite phrase for Christ is the "Son of Man." He's the one who gives us the details about the birth and boyhood of Jesus.

And, by now, all of you can tell me the thrust of John's gospel – Jesus Christ came from God, was God on earth, and went back to God as the risen Savior of the world. Jesus Christ IS the Son of God.

The Gospel of John and 1 John are familiar to most people who study the Word, but hopefully, you've gained some new insight or application to your life, or at least been challenged to really put into practice what you already know is God's will for you.

In the Gospel of John, we got the wonderful "I Am" statements of Jesus; the recording of seven specific miracles, and a fresh revelation of His deity and compassion for the world. In 1 John we were reminded that God is Love, God is Light and God is Life. In Christ we are assured of eternal life – we can KNOW we have eternal life. Why? Because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. The very name of God, YHWH (Yahweh) LORD in Hebrew means "He was, He is, He will be." Or as some say it, "I am that I am."

On the beach when Peter wanted to know "and what about him?" – (referring to John) – Jesus replied, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You follow me." John did remain alive longer than the other disciples did, and as we can see from the little postcards of 2 and 3 John, he planned to still be on the move – visiting face to face – in spite of advancing age.

It's helpful if we take a look at both 2 John and 3 John side by side to see several contrasts:

2 John

Written to a lady & her children

Problem: Lady receiving wrong kind of visitors

A matter of misplaced hospitality

Needed: Truth to balance love

3 John

Written to a man & his acquaintances

Problem: Man rejecting the right kind of visitors

A matter of missing hospitality

Needed: Love to balance truth

In these two little letters we need to look at what John had to say to four people: the warning to the lady of 2 John; and in 3 John the encouragement to Gaius; the criticism of Diotrephes; and the commendation of Demetrius' good testimony.

First the warning to the lady of 2 John . . .

Because the New Testament was not yet a complete written book, early Christians depended on itinerant prophets and teachers to supply the divine revelation they needed to build their faith. They welcomed these traveling preachers, often housing and feeding them in the finest style they could afford. Unfortunately, not all of the roving reverends were worthy of such warm hospitality. It was not uncommon for wicked men to exploit the trusting Christians. So, John addressed two things:

Practicing the truth (vs. 4-6) and
Protecting the truth (vs. 7-11).

As John writes to his friend, it brings him great joy to know that her family is practicing the truth . . . walking in the truth. Truth is so important. Doesn't it bring you joy to know that those you've loved and disciples are firm in faith and in the truth? I know my heart personally is filled to bursting every time I hear of the good things you do and the way you respond to situations in your life because you've learned the truth in this Bible study and have used it as your yardstick for Christian living. I'm so proud of the right choices you make because you've learned the truth.

Obviously, this lady was one who had open doors of hospitality and clearly obeyed the teaching that we should love one another. But love is like a river . . . it can be an untiring bestower of good gifts such as food, nourishment for farmlands, sanctuary for waterfowl, and a highway for commerce . . . or, it can be a mighty tide that destroys with flood and damage if it leaves its banks. The banks of containment for the river of love are truth and discernment. Both must be in place.

Christ commanded us to love one another (John 13:34), but He never meant for us to do so blindly. If we give our affection to one who leads us away from truth, that is

not Christian love. The test of love is whether it leads us closer to Christ. Love never compromises its standards, never consents to sin, and never, never embraces evil.

Love is the hinge on which hospitality turns to open its door. But just as a door has hinges, it also has a lock. John's warning was to protect the truth, "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 . . . If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work." (vs. 7-10)

That's what the Gnostics were doing. Denying Jesus was God come in the flesh. By opening her floodgates of love to these false teachers, the lady was, in fact, aiding and abetting the enemy . . . especially if she gave them money.

How does this apply to us today? All of us have had people knock on our door wanting to bring false teaching into our lives. We should not welcome them into our homes nor take their literature. If you are well grounded in the faith, and see this as an opportunity to witness, then you need to be reminded they will want to tell you what they believe, but will seldom listen to what you want to share. You need to have on your entire spiritual armor and be ready for battle if you take on a cultist. It is rugged spiritual warfare and not for the tenderhearted. You must handle truth in a straightforward manner . . . you won't hurt their feelings because they're trained to turn a deaf ear to what you say and just be persistent in what they want to present.

John Stott has a good comment: "Our love grows soft if it is not strengthened by truth, and our truth grows hard if it is not softened by love." Discernment is essential to the Christian life. John isn't saying we should slam the door in the face of those who believe differently from us. His point is this: Be discerning about whom you invite into your life. Be courageous and stand for what you believe. Truth is needed to balance love.

The battle for truth and against apostasy is fought not only in the home as written about in 2 John, but also especially in the local church; and that is where 3 John comes in. This little letter gives us a glimpse into an early assembly, its people and its problems.

This letter was addressed to Gaius, a dear friend of John's, who was one of the leaders of the assembly. He's also going to speak of two other men, Diotrephes and Demetrius. Wherever there are people, there are problems – and the potential for solving problems. Each of us must honestly face the question, "Am I a part of the problem or a part of the solution?"

Certainly, John wanted to encourage Gaius. Don't you love to receive letters or notes of encouragement? We all do. Since John prays that he may enjoy good health, it is possible that Gaius was physically ill, but John acknowledged that he was indeed

spiritually healthy and walking in the truth. Also, that was a common greeting of the day, so it may have been just that.

Spiritual health shows itself in several ways. One is the good testimony others give of you. John apparently had many visitors who came with good reports of the consistency of Gaius and his Christian walk. He was spoken of as a man whose life was wrapped up in truth . . . the living truth of Jesus Christ.

Another way spiritual health is shown is in practical ministry. Gaius was one who opened his home and his heart to those who were ministers of the Word of God, whether they were strangers or not. While he warned the lady of 2 John against hospitality for false teachers, John commended Gaius for showing hospitality to true ministers of the Word. It's also suggested that Gaius helped them financially to go on about their work. Remember how James reminds us that "faith without works is dead."

I think it's fitting to give all those who support missionaries some encouragement. William Carey had a unique way of putting it. He said, as he was ministering in India, "I will go down (he referred to going to the mission field as going down in the mine), I will go down if you will hold the ropes."

Not everybody can go to the mission field. Certainly, they deserve encouragement and support for doing so. But they would be the first to admit that they can only be effective with consistent support from those back home.

By the way, for whom do you hold the ropes? Whom do you support? Do you know? It is extremely important, Christians, that there be a contact of some kind in a personal way, besides just a few bucks dropped in a plate; that there be some kind of encouraging contact with individuals that are out there at the end of the rope. It's terribly important that we be in correspondence, that we be in touch with these sisters and brothers that are doing battle at the front end. They need more than just money, you know.

Some of you may remember Tom Kimber who was a lecturer for us many years ago. Tom and Sue went to Kunming, China and were on the mission field for ten years. That is the same place where Vance and Bethyl Shepperson ministered. They now reside in Hawaii, but continue to minister in several countries. Currently they are in New Zealand, but they continue to adapt and accept the challenges of a new languages and cultures as they travel. They send their greetings to you.

Having encouraged Gaius, John leveled some criticism toward Diotrephes. He was "fond of being first." It's the idea of being proud of being seen, maintaining absolutely overt authority. Unfortunately, that still exists in the church today . . . especially those churches steeped in legalism. Someone has set himself up as judge of what is acceptable and what is not. They are experts in putting labels on other Christians and classifying them into neat little categories of their own intention. They

base their fellowship on personalities, not on doctrines that are fundamental to the faith. And the tragedy is that these people actually believe that they are serving God and glorifying Jesus Christ.

Diotrephes' pride took over his life in stages. The first stage was resistance: he refused to accept John's authority. Second was criticism: he started hurling unjust accusations at those in authority. Third was isolation: he shut himself off from outside instruction and correction – he didn't receive the brethren. Fourth was control: he forbade people from listening to any teaching except his own.

It says in vs. 10, "He stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church." That's pretty severe, isn't it? Reminds me of the little poem:

Believe as I believe, no more no less
That I am right and no one else, confess;
Feel as I feel, think as I think,
Eat as I eat and drink as I drink;
Look as I look, do as I do
then I'll have fellowship with you.

Pride is a nasty thing. It roars like a lion when it's challenged. One fellow wrote, "Pride is the only disease known to man that makes everyone sick except the person who has it." Intimidation is the tool of Diotrephes types, but John was not intimidated. He would deal with Diotrephes when he came.

There's a challenge in these verses for us. Are you in a position of authority? It may not be in the church, but in your job, or certainly in your home. We all need to be reminded that authority needs to be tempered with a teachable spirit so that you can bend, change your mind, soften, learn, admit, and even confess mistakes.

Well, until he came, John's advice to Gaius (vs.11) . . . "Don't imitate what is evil, but what is good." If you're going to imitate anyone it should be Demetrius.

It is right to imitate human leaders? Yes, if they in turn are imitating Jesus Christ. You and I cannot see God, but we can see God at work in the lives of His children. The godly life and dedicated service of another believer is always an encouragement and stimulus.

Demetrius was a man worth imitating because he was well spoken of by everyone. All the members knew him, loved him, and thanked God for his ministry. There is great worth in having a good name. When we were doing our study on Psalms and Proverbs, one of the questions asked for a favorite verse from that lesson. I chose Proverbs 22:1 "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold." Judy Wyse did this beautiful needlepoint bookmark for me with that proverb. It's something I have treasured for years and that I firmly believe.

Demetrius had a good name. He also had a consistent life that bore witness to the fact that he lived what he believed. Even John bore witness to the integrity of Demetrius. Regarding integrity . . . Ted Engstrom writes:

The World Needs Men (and I might add women) . . .
who cannot be bought, whose word is their bond;
who put character above wealth;
who possess opinions and a will;
who are larger than their vocations;
who do not hesitate to take chances.
The world needs men who will not lose their individuality in a crowd;
who will be as honest in small things as in great things;
who will make no compromise with wrong; whose ambitions are not confined to their own selfish desires.
The world needs men who will not say
they do it because everybody else does it;
who are true to their friends through good report and evil report, in adversity as well as in prosperity;
who do not believe that shrewdness, cunning and hardheadedness are the best qualities for winning;
who are not ashamed or afraid to stand for the truth when it is unpopular. The world needs men who say no with emphasis, though all the rest of the world says yes.

As is our custom, next year we will be back in the Old Testament with the study of the book of Isaiah. Like the book of Job, it is not the easiest to study chapter by chapter and most studies only pick a few chapters and concentrate on them. It contains a great deal of poetry, which is never easy reading for some of us, but the character of God and His prophetic promises are on full display. We will see Jesus as we study this book. We hope to see you in September.

Please remain seated and let's sing **Great Is Thy Faithfulness.**

Great is Thy faithfulness. Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Leaders will present attendance certificates.
Gifts for lecturers.

Let me close with prayer. Holy Father we have been so enlightened and encouraged by this study of John's gospel and three letters. Your Word is a light unto our path as we strive to be more like Jesus. Thank you for all who have served, attended and contributed to People of the Word. As we dismiss for the summer, may we continue to be faithful to reading our Bible and anticipate our new series in the fall.

Thank you for the meal we're going to share together and for our fellowship. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.