

In Truth and Love

DAVE BAST

Tucked way in the back, just near the end of our bibles, is a series of short letters that are addressed to the Church in general, rather than to individuals or specific congregations. Some of these general or catholic in the sense of universal epistles, as they are called, are very short indeed – just one chapter; basically, a single page. They are almost more like New Testament memos than New Testament epistles, but they still have a message worth listening to, which is what we are doing today on Groundwork with the little book of II John. Stay tuned.

Segment 1

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are, Dave, now here in program number two of a four-part look at, as you just said, the memos of the New Testament: Philemon, II John, III John, Jude; very, very short, 300 to 400 Greek words each – a memo indeed – very, very short. They are pretty easy to miss. Sometimes we just skip over them as we flip past them on our way to Revelation – the Bible's last book; but they are very, very interesting. We looked at Philemon in the first program and saw some very interesting implications for the love of Christ and kingdom living throughout all the Church and all the world; and now we come to this little snippet called II John, which has a lot of curiosities in it.

DAVE BAST

It does. I think one of the interesting things... let me just say this, too; why are we doing this? Well, on Groundwork our goal is to cover most of scripture eventually, so we don't want to skip over things, and admittedly, this is not the book of Romans here that we are talking about when we come to II John; but the other thing about it is, these memos, as we are calling them, give a fascinating insight into the life of the First Century Church, and there are all kinds of implications that sort of bubble up. Last week as we looked at Philemon, we talked a lot about the problem of slavery and how it was addressed and how it was not addressed, and what the implications of that might be for us today; but today we will look at II John and just... well, here is the way it opens.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹The Elder. To the lady chosen by God and to her children whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth ²because 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. So those are the first three verses of this little memo, and they are riddled with some curiosities; one thing we will think about in a bit is how he is piling up the word *truth* a lot, and that will come up a few verses later; but there are some other puzzles right off the bat, too.

DAVE BAST

Well, a couple of them: One: Who is writing? And two: To whom is he writing?

SCOTT HOEZEE

To whom is it, yes.

DAVE BAST

I mean, grace, peace, and mercy to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus – that is kind of familiar. That is a standard New Testament opening; but right off the bat we wonder who is the writer because all he says about himself is: The Elder. Now, in our Bibles this book is called II John, and that naturally for most of us suggests the Apostle John, and there are actually five different New Testament books with his name attached to them. So, there is the Gospel and there are the three letters – I, II, and III John, and finally the book of Revelation; but John does not name himself here, nor does he call himself an apostle.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nor does he refer to himself the way he seems to refer to himself in the Gospel as the beloved disciple. Scholars are all over the place, not surprisingly, and we are not going to spend too much time on this because we are trying to dig into scripture, not scholarly debates, but there are lots of debates as to whether it is the same person named John. There are a couple of different people who we know of who were named John in the early Church. Some think that there is one writer of the Gospel who almost certainly also wrote I John, which is a longer letter, which bears all kinds of similar marks to the Gospel; and then some think there may be a different John, or somebody else who wrote II and III, and some think there is even a different one yet again in Revelation – that John of Patmos is none of the above – that he is not the one who wrote the Gospel or any of the epistles that bear his name; so it is kind of all over the map and we are not one hundred percent sure.

DAVE BAST

It is, and unless you are a New Testament scholar, I don't think you have to worry about it. I don't worry about it; I just figure it was John – you know, John the Apostle; and as we look at II and III John, the less familiar books, we will see all kinds of verbal connections and the overlap of themes and ideas with both I John and the Gospel of John, which makes me perfectly comfortable – since I am not a professional at this; I don't teach in a seminary – with just saying, hey, it is John; let's call him John.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So he calls himself The Elder, which in the Greek is *presbuteros*, from which we eventually got our word *presbyter* and Presbyterian, even. So he is the elder, and there are some flourishes in here that do bear John's fingerprints, or at least the first epistle of John. Now the next question: Who is the lady? To the Lady!

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; and in Greek it is two words: *eklekt? kyria*; so, here is the first question: Is this an individual? Is it a woman named Eklekt?, or maybe named Kyria, or maybe it is her first and last name: Eklekt? Kyria? It is usually translated: To the elect lady...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The chosen lady.

DAVE BAST

The chosen lady – chosen by God – and to her children; so here we are on firmer ground, I think, in saying no, this is not an individual – this is not John's girlfriend or his wife that he is writing this love letter to. He says: I love you in the truth. This is the Church personified as a woman, and there is actually a connection with Revelation in that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and also to the whole image of the Bride of Christ and Jesus... So, the lady is the Church. John, who has identified himself as an elder, is writing to the Church whom he loves, and as we pointed out – we will look at this a little bit more also in the next segment – he is really, really concerned about *truth*; and that will be a big player in the final little part of this memo as well; but this is addressed to the Church – to God’s chosen Church, as we sing in the hymn: Elect from every nation yet one over all the earth... The Church that God loves, as John makes very clear here.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I think that is a great thing; just that simple idea that the Church is both chosen by God and beloved of God – the beloved of God. One of the Puritans’ favorite phrases, you know... Jesus was the beloved Son, and the Puritans used to like to talk about being “accepted in the beloved.” As we are chosen by God to be brought to Him through Christ, we are viewed the same way He views Jesus His beloved Son. We are His beloved; and the pastors of the Church because that is what the word *presbyter* means. An elder was not necessarily an age descriptive, it was an office; and so John is writing as the pastor – more than pastor – he is an Apostle with oversight over the whole region – generally speaking to all these congregations, he has a pastor’s heart for them. So it is a heart that loves them in the truth, and all who love the truth love the Church. So, you know, God’s whole deal is with the Church. That is important to remember.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And He makes it very, very clear that what distinguishes the Church from others is that it is steeped in truth; but what is that truth? Well, we will dig into that next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

Hi; I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork, where today we are digging into II John, and we want to move right on to the next part of this one-chapter letter, so we pick it up with verse 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... (again, that is the Church, as we said in the first segment) 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.

So, there are two big themes, right there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and also just before we dive into that, here is also something that may argue for John the Apostle – the disciple – writing this because he uses: In the beginning. He loves making these Genesis echoes. We remember from John’s Gospel: In the beginning was the word and the word was with God... echoing back to Genesis. That is the first thing in I John Chapter 1, the longer epistle that we are not looking at in this series, and now here twice, because we have heard from the beginning, in the beginning. He likes hitting those big scriptural themes, and the message is simple: We knew this from the beginning. We know the truth and the truth is love; and love is obedience to God’s commands, so love and truth are all bound up together.

DAVE BAST

They are all intertwined, and this image is walking. So he says in verse 4: You know, I am rejoicing... it gives me great joy to know that you and your children, dear Lady, at least some of them, he says, speaking of the majority, we hope, of the Church members, are walking in the truth, so that is number one; and then in verse 6: You have heard from the beginning His command is that you walk in love; so we are called to walk in truth and walk in love simultaneously – kind of keep one foot in each area as we move forward. The analogy or the metaphor of walking is a common New Testament one for how we live, just day in and day out; it is kind of a long journey, you know; Eugene Peterson’s great phrase: A long obedience in the same

direction, that is the Christian life. So as we do that, as we live out our daily lives, we are called to these twin ideas of truth and love, and they are not always easy to hold together. Sometimes they seem contradictory.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and just on that by the way, too, in terms of the walking, it reminds me, you know, that is what discipleship is. Even the German word that Dietrich Bonhoeffer used, *nachfolge*, which is following, right? We are all about... What did Jesus say first thing to the disciples? Follow Me. And the following never stops; so it is all about walking. Love and truth... if we go back to John's Gospel, the opening chapter – John Chapter 1 – that Jesus was the one who came full of grace and truth, and Jesus combined those two perfectly. We often struggle to keep them in tension; but the truth is, we are to love one another, and that, too, by the way, more echoes of John's Gospel... We think of John 13, John 14, you know, Jesus' last night on what we often celebrate on Maundy Thursday – Jesus washing the disciples' feet... Maundy... most of us don't even know what that word means, but it is from the Latin *mandatum*, which is a mandate or a command – command – mand – it is even in the word *command*; and what was Jesus' new command? Love one another.

DAVE BAST

That you love one another as I have loved you. So it was no longer new by the time John is writing II John as a very old man at the end of the First Century, but it was new that night when Jesus gave it to them in the upper room: A new commandment I give you... and John says... it is really quite touching, I think. He says, you know, we have had this from the very beginning – from the beginning of knowing Jesus and walking with Him we are called to love one another, but we are also called at the same time to walk in the truth; and you know, that requires a commitment to believing something. That something is quite specific and quite definite. So John is going to say quite a bit about false teachers. We are going to look at that in our last segment, but it requires standing up for the truth at times. It requires defending the truth. Sometimes that is not easy to square with the command of love; so, if truth makes us speak the truth... You think of Paul's phrase: Speak the truth in love. Truth calls us to bear witness to itself, but love requires that we do that with compassion and with sympathy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that we do what Jesus did; so if Jesus, according to John 1 in the Gospel of John, if He was the one who – the preeminent one who combined truth and grace in Himself, well what was the truth? The truth is, we did not deserve anything, right? We deserve punishment; we deserve to die; we were sinners; but truth was bound to grace; and also now to love. We could easily expand grace – He allied grace into love – and the truth is, God did not give us what we deserved, and Jesus did not give us what we deserved, and so the truth is that the world changes through self-giving love – sacrificial love. This is what true love is, Jesus said. You lay down your life for your friends. That is what Jesus is going to do preeminently, and that is what we are called to do. So the truth of the universe is something else Jesus revealed, and that is that the truth is life works best when we serve each other; that life works best and we flourish best in God's good creation when we are humble and self-giving and even self-sacrificing in love for others. That is a hard truth and it is a countercultural truth, right, in a world where only the strong get ahead and where you have to kick and shove your way and look out for number one and be gruff and brusque and grab for the gusto. The real truth is that that is false. The real truth is self-giving love, and that is what Jesus revealed; and walking in that truth, following Jesus, means taking up our cross and living self-sacrificing lives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

One other point maybe to comment on... John makes a great deal about commanding here, and he says in effect, we are commanded to love, and somebody may wonder: How can you do that? How can you command me to love another person? Isn't that something that only comes from me if I feel love towards them? How can I... but this is consistent New Testament teaching, and it has to do with what the New Testament means by love. It is not a feeling. It is not an emotion. It is a decision to act for the benefit of another – to do good intentionally to others; and that is what we are called to do; that is what Jesus did. You mentioned Jesus' self-giving love. That is the ultimate truth of the universe. So for us that is a decision to make. If we are going to be disciples, we have to walk in both truth and love.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is a popular song that has the chorus that you can't order love. Well, that is true if by love you mean feeling all gushy and romantic and starry-eyed. You cannot order somebody to fall in love in that romantic sense – that cannot be forced; that has to happen naturally; but you can order people to behave, and that is C. S. Lewis's great line, right? We like to quote C. S. Lewis. C. S. Lewis says: If you want to learn how to love somebody, act lovingly toward them; and you can do it. You can be ordered to act lovingly. Do the right thing; and very often you will find feelings of love toward that person will follow.

DAVE BAST

Well, there is one more little paragraph at the end of II John, and that is going to raise the issue of defending the truth. We have talked about love and truth, and we are going to look at that next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and here is the final section of II John, where he brings up a subject that is of special concern, not only in II John, but also in III John. So, listen to what he says:

⁷I say this... (And *this* refers to walking in the truth and walking in love at the same time.) I say this because 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. ⁸Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. ⁹Anyone 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. ¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. ¹¹Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, now here is a very interesting passage on multiple levels, not least of which... because this is one of only about three or so times in the New Testament where the word *antichrist* is used. In Greek it is a smash-together of Christ – *christos* – and the preposition *anti* – to be against; and it is a very interesting thing to observe because say the word *antichrist* to even most people in the Church, and even to some people outside the Church and they think: Oh, there is going to be *one* antichrist. It is going to be a monster human being – a world dominator; some combination of Hitler and Osama Bin Laden, and who knows what. There is going to be one antichrist at the end of time. Well, guess what. That is not how the Bible ever uses the term. John says there are going to be lots of antichrists throughout history, starting today, and we still have them today; and who is the antichrist? Anybody who says Jesus was not the Son of God in the flesh. Anybody who denies Christmas is an antichrist.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is it; absolutely; and a deceiver, John says; so what he is really talking about here is false teaching, and it all has to do with the truth of the Gospel. To talk about fighting for the truth of the faith and all that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Defending orthodoxy.

DAVE BAST

Defending ortho... It kind of conjures up pictures of witch hunts and burning heretics at the stake and all that; and yes, obviously the Church has made mistakes in the course of its long history. We have learned that it is not good to coerce the truth, but rather that is the love side of it. You speak the truth in love; but at the same time, Christians are called to the task of defending our faith; and we have a perfect right to insist that

those who would teach in the Church have themselves made a commitment to Christian orthodoxy – that is to the Apostolic witness about Jesus Christ; and that, frankly, boils down to the New Testament. That is why we say our authority is scripture for what we both believe and what we do. It is our rule of faith and practice. So, the Apostles were chosen as eyewitnesses to the central truth that in Jesus God became a human being; and to deny that – to say: No, Jesus was only a good man or He was a good teacher or He was a prophet, or He wasn't even a real human being at all, He was some kind of avatar or spirit or...

Scott Hoezee: Angel.

DAVE BAST

Guru, or whatever; that is antichrist, which does not just mean to be against Christ, it means to be a kind of counterfeit Christ – antichrist – the implication of the Greek word is instead of Christ or in place of – a kind of false messiah.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, defending orthodoxy, and of course, the word *orthodoxy* means right teaching; you know, we have orthopedics, where you want the doctor to make your bones straight. Orthodoxy is making your teaching straight, and for John that is very clear that that involves the full confession of Jesus as both divine and human – the in-the-flesh Son of God; and actually, if you think about it, Dave, and we don't have time to do it, but if we were to start ticking through Church history of all of the heresies and all of the places where the Church went off the rails, so very often it did start with denying the uniqueness of Jesus; and it is still happening today. I find it so interesting that already now, later in the First Century, John may be an old man by now but we are still in the First Century – we are still within a half-century of the lifetime of Jesus – and already then the heresy of Gnosticism, which denied the fleshly reality of Jesus as Son of God – it was already then, and it is still rampant in the world today. That is sort of the first thing people do when they want to chip away at Christianity is to deny Jesus. Now why is that so important? Well, John knows what I think we know, and that is if Jesus was not the Son of God, everything in Christianity is actually off the rails. There is not much left. If we got that wrong two thousand years ago, there is not a lot left.

DAVE BAST

Well, and so John warns here: Watch out, he says. I mean, don't leave – don't depart from this. This is the core deposit that has been entrusted to us. Paul defined the Gospel once as: I delivered to you what I myself received; that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; that He was raised again according to the scriptures. So, that is the core deposit; and that is why Peter says if you run ahead and don't continue in the teaching of Christ, you don't have God, because the implications of the Gospel – we could obviously spend a lot more time than we have on teasing out what it means to have Jesus, who was both fully human and fully divine – the true God-man together. He is our go-between; He is our link; He is the means by which we deal with our sins. If you don't have Him, says John, you don't have either the Father or the Son. So, stick to the truth, believe me, because it is the only thing that can save you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and again, if indeed... and sometimes you hear people say: Well, you know, what people believed 2,000 years ago... Isn't that outdated? Don't we need to update that to stay with the times? I remember the theologian, Robert Jenson, once said: You know, if the folks even in Antioch 2,000 years ago got this wrong, we are doomed. Let's just become a different religion or no religion because that really is the linchpin and the core, and that is the truth; and the truth is a beautiful truth, too, because Jesus was the Son of God in the flesh who showed us the power of *agape* – who showed us the power of love – following Him, walking in that truth is beautiful because it reveals to us the very heart of God. If Jesus was God in the flesh, then it is now revealed to us that the heart of God is the heart of love and of self-giving love, and that is where true life is found.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely. Truth is both crucial and fragile, so we need to stick to it and we need to protect it for all that we are worth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we always want to know how we can help you dig deeper into the scriptures. So visit our website, groundworkonline.com, and suggest topics and passages for future Groundwork programs.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/in-truth-and-love>

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