



Sunday School Lesson for November 23, 2003.
Released on November 21, 2003.

Study 2 John 4-9; 3 John 3-12. Remain Loyal
Questions and answers below.

TIME: about A.D. 90-95
PLACE: probably from Ephesus

2 John 4-9

4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

3 John --12

3 For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

5 Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;

6 Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:

7 Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth.

9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrefes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

11 Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

12 Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.

Lesson Background

We turn to 2 John and 3 John for more instruction from that inspired apostle.

Second John is addressed to a Christian lady and her children, who are well loved by other Christians (2 John 1). Nothing is said about her husband, so we may suppose that she was a widow. Some think that he was still living, but was a pagan with no interest in Christianity. On the other hand, some think "the lady" to be figurative language for a local church, or possibly for the church universal, consisting of all the churches in the world. If that is what John had in mind, the lady's children would be the members of the church, or of all the churches. In either case, John's thoughts are helpful for Christians everywhere.

Third John is addressed to a good Christian man named Gaius. Here again we find teaching that is beneficial for all Christians as we read this man's mail. Let us see how those two letters encourage all of us to remain loyal.

THE WALK OF LOVE (2 John 4-6)

1. What title did John use for himself in II and III John (extra credit, not in lesson text)?

Both of the letters we are studying are from "the elder" (II John 1:1; III John 1:1). Some have attempted to say that the writer is a certain John the elder, not John the apostle. However, comparing these epistles with I John and John's Gospel makes it clear that the same person penned all of these books. That John would call himself an elder is not unusual as a church leader, he could appropriately be called an elder, just as Peter was (I Pet. 5:1).

2. Every teacher in the church wants his or her learners to be "walking in truth" (v. 4). What does a teacher need to do to ensure that this happens?

Teaching Bible content is crucial! (See Psalm 119:11; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17). We should note with a word of caution that some "small group" ministries tend to de-emphasize Bible content in favor of creating either support groups or groups that concentrate on studying topics. While topical studies and support groups fill important needs, it is dangerous to allow the teaching of the Bible to get squeezed out in the process. Small-group leaders need to emphasize solid Bible study within their groups or make sure that group members are involved in significant Bible studies that complement the small-group efforts.

An emphasis on teaching Bible content won't be effective, however, if the teacher isn't "practicing what he preaches." Teachers must model personally what they teach (1 Timothy 4:12b). People can see through hypocrisy or inconsistent lifestyles. Teachers who cause their learners to stumble in their faith-walk will be held accountable (Luke 17:1).

3. To what does "lady" refer in II John 1:5?

The epistle of II John is addressed to "the elect lady and her children" (1:1), a likely reference to the church. If this is correct, "children" (v. 4) refers to the members of this otherwise unknown congregation to which the Apostle John wrote.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, the church is depicted as the bride of Christ (Rom. 7:4; II Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33).

Since John rejoiced greatly concerning the faithfulness of these believers, it is likely that he had just visited this church or had come in contact with some of their members elsewhere.

Either way, John was pleased that these Christians were walking in the truth, that is, continuing to maintain doctrinal purity and personal integrity in their lives. The beloved disciple rejoiced because they were obeying God as seen in their willingness to keep His commandments.

4. What was the commandment that was "from the beginning" (v. 6)?

The reference to the "beginning" (II John 1:5) does not mean the beginning of the world (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1) but the beginning of the gospel being announced to the world by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Mark 1:1).

John was simply reminding these believers of the commandment of Christ that we are to love one another. Indeed, this is what sets Christians apart and identifies us as true disciples of the Lord (John 13:35). Love is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), the crowning virtue in Christian growth (II Pet. 1:5-7), the greatest gift (I Cor. 13:1-3), the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10), and the singular virtue that binds everything together in perfect unity (Col. 3:14).

While love may be expressed in any number of ways, John here emphasized that true Christian love can be seen in our willingness to "walk after his commandments" (II John 1:6). No one can say that he loves God and then deliberately disobey what He has commanded. To know God is to love Him; to love Him is to obey Him. Just as Christ was obedient to the Father's will, so we must be obedient children of our Father (Heb. 5:8,9).

AVOIDING DECEIT (2 John 7-9)

5. How did John use the term "antichrist" (v. 7)?

Christians take care to be loyal to the truth because many deceivers are entered into the world and are teaching falsehood. Some are even in the church itself (2 Peter 2:1), and some have come into the church and left—taking others with them as they go. The falsehood at issue in this verse is that they confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.

Anyone who rejects the incarnation is not only a deceiver but also "an antichrist" (II John 1:7). While the concept of the antichrist is frequently identified with the beast out of the sea in Revelation 13 and Paul's "man of sin" (II Thess. 2:3), the actual word "antichrist" appears only in I and II John. Here, John used it to refer to the false teachers of his day, of which he said there were many (I John 2:18; 2:22; 4:3).

6. John warns believers to "Look to yourselves that we lose not those things we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (v. 8). What are some specific things believers can do to heed this warning?

In the context here, John is specifically warning about false teachers. To recognize a counterfeit, one must be so thoroughly acquainted with the genuine as to see the difference. So believers must spend time in the Word, becoming so familiar with it

that any false teaching is immediately recognized. Like the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11), they need to search the Scriptures daily and compare what they find with what they hear from those who claim to teach the Word.

Ask class members to tell what they do, besides attending Sunday school, to be familiar with the Bible. Do some read through the Bible each year? What reading plan do they follow? What other ideas can they suggest?

7. In the context of this epistle, what is the "doctrine of Christ" (v. 9)?

The word translated "transgresseth" in II John 1:9 literally means "to go aside." The idea is that one who accepts false teaching is not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ."

In the context of this letter, the "doctrine of Christ" seems to refer to basic doctrinal convictions concerning Jesus Christ, especially belief in the incarnation. To reject what the Scriptures say about Christ is to reject God Himself. Since there is an essential unity between the Father and the Son (John 10:30), we cannot have one without the other.

FOLLOW TRUTH (3 John 3,4)

8. To whom was III John (1:1) addressed?

As in III John, the author of III John referred to himself as "the elder" (1:1) in this epistle. This letter, however, was addressed to a certain Gaius. Since there are several men in the New Testament with this name (Acts 19:29; 20:4; I Cor. 1:14), we cannot be sure whether it was one of these or another by the same name. We can assume, however, that he must have been a leader in the church.

9. Whom did John mean by "my children" (v. 4)?

The brethren to whom John referred were likely traveling teachers or missionaries who had gone out under the blessing of the apostle. John greatly rejoiced when these brethren reported to him that Gaius was walking in the truth (v. 3).

For John to hear that his children were walking in truth was the greatest joy he could experience (v. 4). That he called them "children" probably indicates they had looked to him as their spiritual father (I Cor. 4:15).

SHOW HOSPITALITY (3 John 5-8)

10. How should Christians treat traveling missionaries and evangelists (vs. 5,6)? Why?

Gaius has done something good for the brethren, and John commends him. For the hospitality Gaius had shown to the traveling teachers, John was grateful. Even though these teachers were "strangers," Gaius was willing to open his home to them. It is still a blessing to offer hospitality to visiting evangelists and teachers.

Once these missionaries had returned to John, they bore testimony before the whole church that Gaius had extended Christian hospitality to them (v. 6). The reference to the "church" should be understood as an assembly of the believers in a

particular location, probably Ephesus, where John resided for many years. Church buildings did not come into existence until long after the New Testament period; nevertheless, these teachers publicly affirmed Gaius's love toward them.

"Whom if thou bring forward on their journey" in III John 1:6 means that the traveling teachers should be supported in future endeavors as well. The evangelists sent out by John did not go on a mission for their own benefit. Instead, "for his name's sake they went forth" (v. 7). Likewise, those who carry out the Great Commission today, whether at home or abroad, must do so with the blessing of God and the church (Acts 13:1-3).

11. Why does Christian hospitality seem to be a dying ministry today?

Frazzled by their "busy-ness," people today are increasingly protective of their personal time. After a long day at work, running the kids to-and-fro, and just generally keeping up with modern life, it's easy and tempting to stay at home and relax with whatever time in the day remains.

The result is that Christians rarely share personal accommodations or "time off" with friends, let alone with strangers. Even when a host makes his or her time available, the visitors often are taken to a restaurant rather than treated to a home-cooked meal. Evangelists and other church guests frequently are put up in motels instead of being invited to sleep in members' homes. In fact, some travelers prefer the commercial type of "hospitality" because it allows them to avoid having to interact with people. But wiser Christians know that they-and we-are missing a blessing.

12. Why should Christians support Christian causes (vs. 7,8)? Should unbelievers be asked to help?

It is noteworthy that these teachers went out "taking nothing of the Gentiles" (v. 7). Here, "Gentiles" should be understood in the sense of pagans or non-Christians. Those preaching the gospel should receive their support from God's people (Luke 10:7; I Cor. 9:14; II Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4:15). or through some "tentmaking" arrangement (Acts 18:3; I Cor. 9:18). Christian causes should be supported by Christians. We should not ask the world we are trying to win to pay for preaching the gospel to them.

Those who sacrifice time and effort for Christ's sake should be welcomed by God's people among whom they labor. While not all can be directly involved in preaching or missions, supporting those who do so enables us to be partners in spreading the truth.

CHOOSE WORTHY EXAMPLES (3 John 9-11)

13. Who was Diotrephes, and what was his problem (vs. 9-11)? Do we still have people like him in the church?

John informed Gaius that he had previously written to the congregation but had been rebuffed by a certain church leader named Diotrephes. Apparently, this man wanted to have total control over the church and would have nothing to do with the Apostle John.

Sadly, there are still people in church leadership who love to be supremely in charge. Frequently, they want to make all the decisions and castigate any who would challenge their authority. While there are few details in the New Testament concerning church government, the concept of shared leadership seems evident (Acts 6:3; 14:23; 15:6, 22). Those who serve as congregational leaders are not to be church dictators but servants and examples to the flock (I Pet. 5:3).

John anticipated a visit to the unnamed church in question to deal with the autocratic Diotrephes (3 John 10). Not only was this man trying to run the church single-handedly, but he was also slandering the Apostle John.

Diotrephes also refused to welcome the teachers sent by John and prevented those who wanted to receive them from doing so. The reference to casting people out of the church probably meant that he was seeing that they were excommunicated or prevented from worshiping with the church.

The attitude exhibited by Diotrephes indicates that he could function only in a setting where he had total control over others. While this might be perceived as strength, it actually reveals a very weak and insecure individual.

Part of Diotrephes' problem was that he thought himself to be accountable to no one but himself. The elders in the local church need to hold each other accountable for their actions. They also can encourage and support one another in their demanding role as shepherds.

Diotrephes was not an example of that which was good and right among God's people. John's advice was to avoid imitating anything that was evil but rather to pattern themselves after the good. Since God is good, doing good reveals that we are of God. Conversely, anyone who practices evil has "not seen God" (v. 11).

14. What are some sources of evil that people imitate? How do we resist imitating what we see in those sources?

The actions and lifestyles of other people are a great temptation to many. Television allows us easy access to view (and envy) the lives of sinful leisure that many "high profile" people live—an access that did not exist in John's day.

We can resist imitating evil by committing some Scriptures to memory. Then when we need them in order to remain strong we can easily call them up! Some good Scriptures to memorize include Psalm 101:3; Proverbs 23:17; 24:1, 2; and, of course, 3 John 11.

CONCLUSION

In this week's lesson we have seen that in order to show our loyalty to Christ, we must walk daily in the truth that we know. We must also stay away from deceivers. We can show that we love Jesus by taking care of those who work to promote the gospel. We can also work hard to live in harmony with the local church and follow what is good.

PRAYER

Our Father in Heaven, how good it is to know that You have verified the great Christian truths by the miracles of Your Son, and by His resurrection and ascension. Today we pledge our loyalty to Your Son and the truth You have given us; and we

look to You for wisdom, strength, and courage to remain loyal. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Before we were loyal to God, He was loyal to us.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In our lesson next week we will see how we can maintain steadfast faith in our Lord under every kind of circumstance and know that in the end He will keep us from falling. Study the book of Jude.

I hope you enjoyed this week's lesson!

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