

WALKING IN TRUTH AND LOVE

2 John 1:1-13

Key Verse: 1:4

“It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.”

1 John emphasized Christian fellowship. This fellowship originates in God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ and is based on God’s love and truth. We desperately need this kind of fellowship to be strengthened in our faith and to overcome the world. This fellowship gives us true joy, peace and hope. It helps us have assurance of eternal life and true victory. 1 John is like a treatise that lays the spiritual foundation for Christian fellowship. 2 John shows how this fellowship is practiced in the Christian community.

Since Covid-19 broke out, our social environment has changed drastically. It has been necessary to stay at home and keep distance for the sake of everyone’s safety. Now we communicate mostly online or by phone. We are afraid to meet in person. This lifestyle change may have affected our mindset, even unintentionally, by making us self-centered or even selfish. At the same time, temptation and false teachings can enter our homes through the Internet. We are vulnerable to Satan’s work through them, especially when we are isolated and lonely. That is why we need Christian fellowship practically. Let us listen to John’s teaching.

First, grace, mercy, and peace (1-3). The author identifies himself as “The elder.” The style of writing and the contents are remarkably similar to 1 John (see 1Jn 2:7,22-23; 3:11; 5:3). Since 1 John was written by Apostle John, it is most likely that he wrote 2 John as well--probably from Ephesus in the A.D. 90’s. The letter is addressed to “the lady chosen by God and to her children.” The word “lady” appears twice in this letter and nowhere else in the Bible. “The lady” can refer to a specific woman with her children in a house church, or a local church and its members. The word “lady” suggests that the church is the bride of Christ (Eph 5:25–27; Rev 19:7–8). In any case, it is not just a private letter, but a letter to the Christian community. “Lady chosen by God”

is a term of endearment and respect and tells us that the recipients were very well known to John. She is “chosen” because God elected her to belong to him. This reminds us that we did not choose God; God chose us (Jn 15:16). It is not accidental, but God’s providence. This gives us assurance of God’s love and protection.

The warm relationship between John and his recipients is described in verse 1b, “...whom I love in the truth...” Their relationship was based on truth and love. In verses 1-6, the words “truth” (1[2],2,3,4) and “love” (1,3,5,6[2]) are both repeated five times. Truth and love are foundations of Christian fellowship. Truth and love always go together and should not be separated. If truth is emphasized without love, it leads to dogmatism, legalism, coldness, and division. On the other hand, if love is emphasized without truth, people lose discernment, fall into error, and easily go astray. Love must be grounded on truth. And truth must be practiced with love. So Paul said, “Speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). The truth is not just a concept, but it lives in God’s people. In fact, the Truth is the person of Jesus Christ who has come in the flesh. Before receiving Jesus as the Truth, believers do not know each other. But Jesus calls us together into Christian fellowship. That is why John and “all who know the truth” greeted the lady and her children (1c). Likewise, the truth has united us together. The truth lives in us and will be with us forever (2). The truth grounds us and sustains us in our present fellowship and carries us into eternity.

On the basis of truth and love, John greeted his recipients: “Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love” (3). This greeting is not a mere humanistic wish; it has deep meaning. Grace is God’s undeserved favor which is freely bestowed on unworthy sinners. This is the grace of forgiveness, salvation, and acceptance as God’s children. We did not do anything to earn this grace. It is given only out of God’s unconditional love because God is love (Eph 2:8; 1Jn 4:8,16). “Mercy” is God’s compassion toward those in serious need. God is rich in mercy (Eph 2:4). This mercy motivates God to use his mighty power to save people who cannot save themselves (Ro 11:30-32). Without God’s mercy, no one can be saved or even survive. God is so merciful that when we cry out to him, he hears our prayers. The words “Have mercy on me,” are most powerful

(Lk 18:13,38). "Peace," in the Hebrew concept, emphasizes wholeness and wellbeing of life in all its aspects. It conveys ideas such as safety, rest, and contentment. We need grace, mercy, and peace daily. These blessings come only from God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son. John's greetings close with the words "will be with us in truth and love." Truth unites the Christian community against falsehood. Unity comes about as we love one another.

Second, walk in truth and love (4-13). Verses 4-6 emphasize walking in love based on the truth in our community. The word "walk" is repeated three times and the word "command" four times. This emphasizes that obedience to God's commands characterize the lifestyle of believers. Verse 4 says, "It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us." Here the word "some" does not indicate that others were not walking in the truth. Rather, it means that John found out only about some of them. "Walking in the truth" means they acknowledged Jesus Christ as the incarnate God who came in the flesh (7; 1Jn 4:2). This echoes the teaching of 1 John that God's command is to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and to love one another (1Jn 3:23). When John found that some of them were obeying God's command and walking in the truth, it gave him great joy. There are many kinds of joy. But this joy is special. It is God's joy that comes when his people live by the truth. This joy comes to those who take care of God's people, like John did.

In verses 5-6 John tells how walking in the truth is expressed. He was not writing a new command but one that they had had from the beginning. He said: "I ask that we love one another. And 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." We may not like the word "command," but we cannot avoid it in these verses. A command is to be obeyed. It calls for an act of will. God does not force us to obey him. He wants us to obey him out of love and with a willing attitude. To love others is not just between us and them, it is between us and God. To please God we must love one another in obedience to his command. When we decide to obey his command, he helps us to love one another. When we walk in the truth and love one another, we can have a beautiful fellowship in Christ. This fellowship encourages us to overcome the world.

However, enemies arise who want to destroy this fellowship. In verses 7-11 John tells his children to watch out for deceivers and explains who they are. Verse 7 says, "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." Why is it a serious matter to deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh? It is because this denial undermines gospel faith. If Jesus were not God in the flesh his sacrifice would not be sufficient to save all people who believe in him from their sins. But Jesus died as the sinless Son of God, the perfect sacrifice, once for all (Heb 7:27; 9:14; 10:14). On the basis of Jesus' atoning sacrifice, God forgives all our sins, remembers them no more, and accepts us as his beloved children. This is gospel truth which is essential to our Christian faith. Anyone who tries to distort the gospel truth is a deceiver. Yet deceivers never say, "I am a deceiver!" They always say, "I am speaking the truth! Trust me." They approach in the guise of angels of light or in sheep's clothing though they are ferocious wolves (Mt 7:15; 2Co 11:14). They promise health, wealth, and prosperity in this world. But they are unconcerned about our souls. They do not use the words "repent," "cross," "deny yourself," or "obey" because these words offend people. They try to please people, not God. In this way they destroy people's souls for their own temporal benefit. So we need spiritual discernment.

In verse 8 John strongly warns: "Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully." Here losing one's reward does not refer to salvation, which is a free gift. It is losing one's reward for faithful service. As Jesus' parable of the talents indicates, God rewards his faithful servants. Matthew 25:21 says, "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" Among us are many faithful servants. But Satan is looking for the chance to steal their reward. This is why we should watch out. We should not be complacent, but always alert. Jesus--after giving signs of the end of the age--warned: "Watch out that no one deceives you" (Mt 24:4; Mk 13:5).

In verses 9-11 John tells us how to evaluate teachers and respond to them. Verse 9 says, "Anyone 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.” There is a contrast between running ahead and continuing in the teaching. Those who run ahead assume they have mastered the gospel’s teachings and are eager to try something new and different. They assume that they do not need to hear the gospel message anymore. They say, “We know that message. We are tired of it.” Though they may say many good things, they do not have God or Jesus in their life or teaching. So they do not have eternal life. On the other hand, the gospel message is like a spring of water welling up to eternal life. It is ever new, refreshing, and life-giving. It is the source of true joy and peace. Though we hear it repeatedly and teach it again and again, it is never boring. It is the life-giving word of God. Jesus said, “I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever!” (Rev 1:18). Let us renew the gospel message in our hearts and continue to teach this message!

In verse 10 John tells us how to respond to false teachers practically: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them.” We need to understand these verses in their context. In those times, itinerant evangelists traveled among the churches to spread apostolic teachings. Not many people had access to the Scriptures. The New Testament canon was not yet settled and there was no Christian publishing house or online system. It was crucial that scattered house churches receive apostolic teachings. This is why the role of itinerant evangelists was so important. As they traveled from place to place, they depended on the hospitality of local residents; there was no hotel chain. Many local churches were willing to receive them and provide hospitality. But false teachers took advantage of this to infiltrate the church and promote heresies. So the believers needed to discern true gospel teachers from the false in practicing hospitality. To help them, the Didache, known as the Lord’s teaching to the Twelve Apostles to the nations, gave instructions about any itinerant evangelist: *“he shall not remain except one day; but if there be need, also the next; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodges; but if he ask [asks for] money, he is a false prophet.”*¹ John tells believers not to receive

¹ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0714.htm>

false teachers in their homes or welcome them. The word translated “welcome” (chairein) means something like “God bless” or “may it go well.” Believers should not express any affirmation or support for the work of false teachers.

John further warns in verse 11: “Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.” Here “welcome” is from “lego” in Greek and means to say “hello” or to greet. Showing hospitality or verbal agreement would be to participate in their evil work. We do not need to be rude, but neither should we show the slightest encouragement to those who spread false teaching. If we encourage them, we will become partners with them.

In verses 4-11 we learn that walking in truth and love was practiced by showing hospitality with discernment. Showing hospitality is an important Christian virtue. Romans 12:13 says, “Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” Hebrews 13:2 says, “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers....” 1 Peter 4:9 says, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” Showing hospitality should be the common practice of all believers. However, we need discernment in doing so.

We find a good example in Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18. When Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent on a hot day, three strangers appeared. In a manner uncharacteristic of an elderly, wealthy person, Abraham got up, ran to meet them, and bowed low to the ground. He humbly requested that he and his family be allowed to serve them. Then the 99-year-old man hurried to his tent and urged his 89-year-old wife Sarah to prepare the best meal for them. She did so willingly, without complaint. When we see the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah, it warms our hearts. This shows that their family was so full of love and grace that it overflowed. This was the fruit of Abraham’s repentance in response to God’s rebuke, “Walk before me faithfully and be blameless” (17:1). God changed Abraham’s name and established an everlasting covenant with him and his descendants. As a sign of the covenant, Abraham was circumcised according to God’s command. Abraham followed God’s will, giving up his own dream. The Lord’s appearance at this time was a kind of test. Abraham was spiritually alert and discerning enough to welcome the Lord.

Another good example is the family of Priscilla and Aquila. In his final greetings in Romans 16, Apostle Paul was very thankful for them. They had risked their lives to support gospel work with him. Not only Paul, but all the churches of the Gentiles were grateful to them. They opened their home and provided a place for early Christians to worship and have fellowship (Ro 16:3-5a). They served a man named Apollos. After hearing his message, they invited him to their home for a delicious meal and then humbly explained the way of the Lord more adequately. Since then, Apollos became a fruitful Bible teacher (Ac 18:24-28). This shows how they practiced hospitality with discernment. We are very thankful for many hospitable, discerning coworkers among us: M. Theresa Sohn welcomes guests to Chicago wholeheartedly and serves them. Little Sarah Kim serves many growing disciples of Jesus in her house.

Verses 12-13 are farewell greetings. John had much to write to them. But he did not want to do everything online. He wanted to see them in person so that their joy would be complete. When we share joy, it becomes richer and fuller. Face to face fellowship is the source of greater joy than online joy. Finally, the believers in John's home church sent heartfelt greetings.

In this time of pandemic, it is so easy to assume that we cannot show hospitality. But this is the very time it is crucial that we do so. There is so much we can do to strengthen our house churches and our community. Husbands, wives, and children can pray together in their homes. We can prepare Bible study material and be ready to serve God's people. We can carefully, prayerfully invite people to our homes. And of course, we can have many online fellowship meetings and Bible studies. Let us overcome the pandemic's side effect and show Christian hospitality with discernment. Let us walk in truth and love.