

Wednesday 2nd December – 2 & 3 John

Study 8.1- 2 JOHN: Truth and love

Two tiny letters give us a window into the long-term struggle we face as Christians. How do we sustain the gospel life of our fellowship and message for the long term?

Letter to a dear lady

It's likely that the "lady" being written to is a particular local church, and that her "children" are the Christians who make up the church. The anonymity of the letter may be a reflection of the fact that they were a persecuted minority, and that this was a way of keeping the identity of the recipients' secret.

Read 2 John 1-6

Questions

1. *What privileges does the "lady" enjoy?*
2. *What is John confident about (v 2-3)?*
3. *What has never changed, according to John?*
4. *Why do you think it's important for the "lady" to know this?*

This elect (chosen) lady can be confident that she enjoys the grace, mercy and truth of God because she has received Jesus. Note the confidence here. These things "will be with" those who have embraced Jesus Christ. Christians can also be completely confident that all true Christians accept and love them. These are facts, not things to aspire to or earn.

Note that truth and love *always* belong together, and that the truth lives in us and will be with us for ever. John is concerned that the dear lady understands this because, if she loses her grip on either, she will lose her confidence in both. And both are under assault by false teachers.

Beware deceivers!

Read 2 John 7-13

Questions

1. *What do the deceivers deny?*
2. *What will happen if we listen to them?*
3. *Why is it important to “continue” in the commands?*
4. *Why do you think false teachers remain so prevalent, and why do many find their teaching so compelling?*

False teaching does not often look obvious. False teachers will often dial down the volume of the parts of the gospel we find difficult, or else they offer a strength and confidence in areas where we feel weak and helpless. But their appeal is a sweet-smelling trap that will enslave us and ruin our faith. False teaching drags us from God.

Apply

Questions

1. *What do we need to keep confident in?*
2. *How should we respond to deceivers?*
3. *How should we warn others?*

John wants us to know that the stakes are extremely high: life or death, truth or lies, Christ and antichrist. When we lose our grip on Jesus, the only Son of the Father, who came in the flesh, we lose our grip on reality and eternity. We should not welcome false teachers, however positive they seem or widely accepted they are, full stop: not their books, their TV broadcasts or their podcasts.

Study 8.2- 3 JOHN: *First and last*

The church has been rocked by many scandals involving those who seek power, prestige and status over loving, humble, open-hearted service. It was always so.

Staying healthy

Read 3 John 1-8

Questions

1. *What does John pray for Gaius?*
2. *What brings John the greatest joy?*
3. *What does he encourage Gaius to do?*

Physical health is important, but spiritual health is of far greater significance. Group prayer times can often become an “organ recital”, where we pray for an endless list of people’s ailments. But John is brought greatest joy when he hears that Gaius is spiritually healthy. Likewise, John told the dear lady in 2 John not to welcome those who twist the truth. Here in 3 John, we are encouraged to welcome, support and encourage those who are fellow workers for the gospel. (In the ancient world, many gospel workers were itinerant preachers.)

Apply

Questions

1. *How should the priority of spiritual health shape your prayers together?*
2. *How do you support gospel work? Do you need to change the way you give hospitality, finances and encouragement to those who are fellow gospel workers?*

Healthy leaders

Read 3 John 9-14

1. *What behaviour and attitudes do Diotrephes show that mark him out as a bad thing?*
2. *By contrast, what qualities does Demetrius show that confirm he is the genuine article?*

There is no suggestion in these verses that Diotrephes is a false teacher. Instead the problem is that of a powerful personality who wants to be first. He refuses to accept the authority of John (v 9) or to welcome the itinerant teachers (v 10). He undermines the position of others and expels perceived rivals (v 10) so that he can be first. He may not have a problem with truth, but he has a problem with power. The result is almost as destructive as false teaching.

By contrast, the goodness of Demetrius' character is acknowledged by everyone. "Even by the truth itself" (v 12) means that he taught what was true and his life matched his message. This is the sort of person we must imitate (v 11).

Apply

Someone may be "a great teacher", have bags of personality, be a decisive and strong visionary, and command a lot of respect. And yet, if they have a bullying or dominating personality, it will be toxic to the health of the church.

Questions

1. *Can you think of people or situations where this has happened?*
2. *Whose example are you following?*
3. *What will you pray for as a result?*