

THROUGH THE BIBLE 2 & 3 JOHN

Tonight I have with me a list named, “The Top Ten Shortest Books.” It consists of some pretend titles...

- 10) America’s Most Popular Lawyers
- 9) Different Ways to Spell Bob
- 8) French Hospitality
- 7) The 2013 Atlanta Falcons Football Highlights
- 6) The Loganville Travel Guide
- 5) Everything Men Know About Women
- 4) Everything Women Know About Men
- 3) The Engineer’s Guide to Fashion
- 2) The Amish Phone Directory
- 1) Pastor Sandy’s Jokes That Are Actually Funny

These would all be very short books, and speaking of short books... we have two to study tonight.

2 & 3 John are the shortest books in the Bible. Both books combine for a mere 27 verses - just 500 words.

I call them “The Lilliputian Letters” after the little people in Gulliver’s Travels. You could also call them “The Fruit of the Loom Letters” – since both are *brief*.

Once a family was eating at a restaurant. During the meal the husband left for the restroom. He was gone a long time. Finally, his wife sent her son to make sure dad was okay. The boy walked into the restroom, and saw three stalls - but he couldn't see his dad - so he called out, "*Dad, are you alright, where are you?*"

A voice sounded from the middle stall, "*Son, I'm okay, I'm in the second John.*"... And so are we...

Turn with me to John's second epistle...

John begins by introducing himself, "*The Elder...*"

These letters were perhaps the last NT books written. By the time he penned them John was 100 years-old - the last living of the original twelve apostles.

John's stature was unsurpassed within the Christian community. He was known not just as *an* elder, but as "*THE Elder.*" John was an elder with a capital "E."

He writes, "*to the elect lady and her children...*"

Some expositors believe the "*elect lady*" is actually a "*sister church.*" In the NT the Church is referred to as *the Bride of Christ*. It's *possible* the lady and her children are titles for a specific body of believers. But it's *more probable* John has a specific person in mind.

Some have suggested both ideas are true. He could be writing to a devout Christian lady who's vibrant witness had birthed a church-full of spiritual children.

No personal names are used because John wrote in a time of persecution. He didn't want to give enemies of the faith ammunition to target anyone specifically.

John writes “to the elect lady and her children whom I love in truth...” Here’s John's theme - *love in truth*.

1 John told us if we love God we’ll love our brother, but here we’re told real love never ignores the truth.

God’s love is always in harmony with God’s truth.

If ever our love causes us to ignore the truth - if in the name of love we tolerate, or gloss over, or accept a falsehood - realize we’re not exhibiting the true love of God. Real love affirms and supports God’s truth!

In today’s “Can’t Offend, Tolerant-Of-Everything, Watered Down World” many churches have adopted a “*Love is Supreme, Unity at all Costs*” type of mentality. *Nothing is as important as love and peace and unity.*

Apparently they’ve forgotten the words of Jesus!

In Luke 12:51-53 Jesus said, “Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three.

Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

Jesus said He would draw a line in the sand.

He confronts us with the truth about God, and life, and us, and we're forced to make decisions that will put us at odds with folks who make the opposite choice. At times friction even erupts in the same family.

Not everyone humbles themselves and receives the truth. It's been said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you mad." To insist on unity at all cost glosses over the reality of objective truth - God's truth.

Once a pastor called the kids to the front of the church for a children's sermon. He taught on unity. He said, "Boys and girls, God wants us all to be one." A little 4 year-old shouted, "Yea, but I wanna be 5."

To suggest that Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Atheists, Mormons should just forget their differences and love one another as "brothers" is ridiculous.

As Christians we should love every person and seek to lead them to Jesus, but for us to embrace them as family is to deny the truth that saves us and defines us!

Real love will never deny God's truth!

And to suggest it really doesn't matter what you believe - that doctrine is irrelevant - that all that matters is love - is total naïvety about what the Bible teaches!

I believe the notion that truth is irrelevant is straight from the pit of Hell. *Your doctrine will determine your destiny.* Having love, even faith, is not enough - the real question is can the object of your faith save you?

Just because a baby can suck a bottle is no guarantee he or she will grow up healthy. It depends on the contents of that bottle! Likewise, faith alone will never save. **Faith and love has to be grounded in truth!**

John loves in truth, he pens, “and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever...”

Real truth is eternal. It doesn't shift from age to age, or generation to generation. Its unaffected by popular opinion. It's never trending. It's *absolute and timeless*.

In verse 3 John extends his greetings to the elect lady and her children, “Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Always remember truth and love make a beautiful couple. They're married - wedded - to one another.

Verse 4, “I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.” Apparently, John had been in contact with some Christians who had been discipled by this elect lady, and he rejoices that they're doing well. This is a credit to her and her ministry.

It's true, a person who *walks in truth* is more than likely a person who was *weaned on truth*. Her disciples were on a good trajectory because they were straight from the start. They were grounded in God's truth!

“And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.

This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.” Notice love is measured by *how we walk* - in essence, *what we do*. Love is a lifestyle.

Real love is love in action.

If I really love my wife I'll not just do what's convenient, or easy for me to do, but I'll love her in the way she wants and needs love. *I'll aim to please.*

And this should be our attitude toward God.

Anybody can say they love God, but a real love for God walks according to what's pleasing to Him.

As John puts it, *“according to His commandments.”*

“This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.”

John is asserting that nothing has changed.

From the outset of His ministry, Jesus taught the importance of love for one another. John had reiterated this message... But real love is expressed on God's terms - doing His will, keeping His commandments.

This was the message *“from the beginning.”*

Theologian Richard Niebuhr once said, *“The great Christian revolutions have come not by the discovery of something that was not known before. They happen when somebody takes radically something that was always there.”* We tend to look for new tactics, but it's the rediscovery of simple truths that lights revival fires.

We don't need a new commandment. We need to put our love into action *and it'll change the world!*

Verse 7, “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”

It was Mark Twain who wrote, “A lie runs around the world while truth is putting on her shoes.” Bad news travels faster than good. *And this is true in the church.*

Paul warned the Ephesians about being “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive...” False doctrine constantly blows through the Church. Whether it’s those in John’s day who denied Jesus’ humanity, or those today who deny His deity - let’s be on-guard.

Warren Wiersbe once quoted a pastor of a successful church. He said, “If I took my eyes off this work for 24 hours and stopped praying, it would be invaded before we knew it.” He knew the importance of being vigilant in the cultivation of sound doctrine.

It reminds me of the little boy who was asked by his Sunday School teacher if he knew how to define the term “false doctrine.” He thought the teacher had said, “*false doctoring.*” He replied, “False doctoring is when a doctor gives the wrong stuff to people who are sick.”

And this is also the definition of the term “false doctrine” – it’s the wrong stuff to the spiritually sick.

Here again, John tells us how to spot the person who is *false doctoring* - they may be right on 95% of what they say and teach, but invariably they stray when it comes to what they believe about Jesus Christ.

John noted the deceivers of his day as those “*who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.*”

Recall, John battled a heresy called “*Gnosticism.*” It was a system of belief that denied Jesus’ humanness. In contrast, most false teachers today deny His deity.

Both are wrong. Our Lord Jesus revealed Himself as both *fully man* and *fully God*. He is *the God-man*.

“*Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.*”

John had labored to lay a solid foundation of right teaching in the church of his day, but that foundation can be lost unless each believer takes responsibility to do what he or she can to insure its preservation.

I look at all God has done at CCSM over the years, but if we don’t continue to serve and support and give we can lose the things for which we’ve worked.

If we kick back and say, “*I’ve done my part. I did my time in the nursery when my kids were younger.. I gave money to the last project.. I’ve already done the usher thing. It’s someone else’s turn.*” If we all just pass the buck we can lose what we’ve worked so hard to build.

It’s said, “*No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible.*” That’s why we need to own a personal responsibility for the part God has called us to play.

Verse 9, “*Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the*

Son.” This is why it’s so crucial that you be right in your belief about Jesus. *If you’re not right about Jesus you can’t be right with God!* Jesus is the means by which God has chosen to redeem the world to Himself!

Jesus is the one bridge between man and God.

There is a bridge in China, the Danyang-Kunshan Grand Bridge that purports to be the world’s longest.

It’s part of the Beijing to Shanghai freeway. Its length is 540,682 feet - that’s a tad more than 102 miles long.

Yet this is not the longest bridge. Jesus connects heaven to earth - God to man. He spans the enormous gulf that’s been caused by our sin... Today, even though you’ve transgressed and violated God’s law you can still *know God* and *have God* through Jesus.

And verse 10 works all this out practically, **“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him...”**

In the first Church traveling apostles were numerous.

Many of the infant churches lacked adequate leadership so men traveled from place to place to fill the gap. The churches would put these fellows up, provide their needs, and support their ministries.

In a second century document known as the **Didache** or **“The Teaching of the Twelve,”** instructions were given to churches concerning these traveling apostles.

“Every apostle who comes to you should be received as the Lord. But he should not remain more than one day, and if there is some necessity a second as well; but if he should remain for three, he is a false prophet.”

If he stays more than a weekend without offering to pay you for his upkeep he’s a freeloader, a deadbeat!

“And when the apostle departs, he should receive nothing but bread until he finds his next lodging. But if he requests money, he is a false prophet...”

And not everyone who speaks forth in the spirit (or who says, “*Thus saith the Lord*”) is a prophet, but only if he has the kind of behavior which the Lord approves.

From his behavior, then, will the false prophet and the true prophet be known... And every prophet, who in the spirit, (or who speaks as if it’s by the Holy Spirit) orders a table to be spread shall not eat therefrom; but if he does, he is a false prophet.” In other words, if the Holy Spirit speaks through a person and orders food it’s for hungry, needy people - not the fat-cat prophet.

“And whoever says in the spirit, ‘Give me money’... do not listen to him. But if he says that it should be given for others who are in need, let no one judge him.”

A greedy or lazy person in the ministry is still greedy and lazy. Don’t give in to their appeals for money - no matter how spiritual they sound. The church needs to discern. If there's sincerity, there'll be unselfishness.

It reminds me of the old maxim, “Treat your guest as a guest for two days. On the third day give him a hoe.” It sounds like these instructions from the Didache’...

The Didache was probably written in the second century to correct the church's lack of discernment.

Apparently, the first church abounded in love, but at times they lacked discernment. The church was in the habit of taking in everyone - *true teacher* or *false teacher*. They were so enamored with the need to love they failed to support the truth. John is teaching that a love that is not wedded to the truth is not real love.

It seems this problem in the early church was so prevalent that Christian charity was actually helping the heretics and perpetuating the spread of their heresies.

This is why John warns in verse 11, “**for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.**” Offer a false teacher support and you become an accomplice in their deception. You're aiding and abetting a deceiver.

If two Mormon missionaries pull up to your house on their bicycles. They're hot and sweaty - so in the spirit of niceness - you invite them into your air-conditioned house to take a nap and drink lemonade - *that's wrong!*

You don't want to enable a false prophet to carry on in spreading their deception. You'd like to see them all pooped out and ready to quit. Don't encourage them.

If you see them with a flat tire. You can see that they get to safety, but don't help fix their flat. They'll jump right back on their bike and keep pedaling their heresy.

There may be times to invite the Jehovah Witness into your house - and proper hospitality can be shown. But make sure your intention is to plant seeds of truth in their mind, not just a hot meal in their belly.

I'm not saying don't be friends with the cultist. We need to be a friend of sinners if we're going to lead them to Christ. But when they actively propagate their lies, don't

help them. One commentator writes, “John warns us not to unintentionally collaborate with the enemy... Don’t be mean, but when he comes to your door don’t moisten lips that lie with your lemonade.”

John concludes his second letter, “Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. And this is why these letters are so short and to the point. John was planning a visit where he would end up filling in all the details.

“The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.”

3 John begins, “The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth...” 2 John was written to the elect lady. 3 John is addressed to a man named “*Gaius*.”

There are actually 3 Gaius’ in the NT...

Acts 19 speaks of Gaius the Macedonian... Acts 20, Gaius of Derbe in Galatia... Romans 16 and 1 Corinthians 1 speak of a Gaius that lived in Corinth...

This Gaius to whom John writes could be either of the three I’ve mentioned, or a different man altogether.

Whoever this Gaius was, John loved him in truth!

The Greek name, “*Gaius*” means “*on Earth*” - and the message John sends to Gaius would indeed apply to all of us who presently live on the fallen planet.

3 John is a letter from *the Elder to the earthlings*.

Verse 2, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”

Here’s a verse that for years was misinterpreted and misapplied, and led thousands of Christians into serious error. What John intended to be a simple greeting was taken by certain prosperity teachers as a promise of perfect health and wealth for all Christians.

Oral Roberts was a chief culprit. Oral said that when he first came across 3 John 2, he said to his wife, “Evelyn, now this means we’re suppose to prosper.”

He claimed his whole Christian experience afterwards grew out of this understanding of 3 John 2.

Yet here’s the problem. Throughout the Bible - down through history - even today - there are countless examples of devout believers in Jesus who haven’t prospered financially and suffer chronic illness - yet despite their trials they’ve thrived in their walk with God. Godly people can be poor, and get sick - just like sinners - we both live in a germ-infested fallen world.

To take what John meant as a common salutation - a wish for health and happiness - as a iron-clad doctrine is a example of shoddy biblical interpretation.

Greek scholar Gordon Fee writes, “To extend John’s wish for Gaius to refer to financial and material prosperity for all Christians of all times is totally foreign to the text. John neither intended that, nor could Gaius have so understood it. Thus it cannot be the ‘plain meaning’ of the text.” One of the first rules of hermeneutics, or biblical interpretation, is to look at the verse in its historical and cultural contexts. Always remember, “A text without a context ends up a pretext.”

Gordon Fee calls John's verbiage in verse 2 as "the standard form of greeting in a personal letter of antiquity." It was simply a hopeful and happy greeting.

John gets to the body of his letter in verse 3, "For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth."

Earl Weaver, long time manager for the Baltimore Orioles, once threw a temper tantrum in the dugout. He knocked over coolers and threw whatever he grabbed.

On the team that year was a born again Christian named "Pat Kelly." After Weaver had pitched his fit, Pat spoke up, "Coach, I hope you learn to walk with the Lord." The old coach wasn't too receptive. He snapped back, "I hope you learn to walk with the bases loaded."

Throughout the Bible the Christian life is referred to as a *walk*. We're to walk in love - walk in the Spirit - walk by faith - walk as children of light. Our life with Christ is not a run - nor is it a crawl - it's a walk...

When you run you lose focus...

When you crawl you have no focus...

But when you take a walk the focus is on the One you're with. Walking denotes a consistent, steady, forward progression. Step by step. There's a gentle leading. The time spent is refreshing and rejuvenating.

To "*walk in truth*" is to continue trusting, learning, and applying the truths of God's Word to your everyday life.

Gaius was a fellow believer who walked in truth!

John says to Gaius in verse 4, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” And let me tell you that as a pastor I have no greater joy than to watch the folks under my ministry progress in their walk with Jesus. *To get saved, then grow, then serve...*

Not too long ago a young lady posted on FB how thankful she was for the foundation of solid biblical teaching she had received from CCSM. *I rejoiced!*

This also happens every year in May at the leaders conference we host, I have scores and scores of pastors tell me how impressed they are at the folks from our church - their eagerness to love and serve...

Trust me, this encourages me. Like John, “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*”

“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.” I’ll never forget the first time we came across this verse in our study through the Bible. The church was just a couple years old, and we were on our first trip through the Bible.

At the time we were occupying a building on a temporary basis. In fact, the owner wasn’t even charging us rent. After reading John’s words to Gaius I felt convicted - *we were taking from the Gentiles. We were drawing worldly support for a spiritual venture.*

I felt it was the responsibility of God's people to pay their own freight, so the next week I started sending the landlord an unsolicited check once a month.

Before we sent that first check the owner didn't want to rent us the building. That's why we were temporary. He was adamant. He wanted more rent than we could afford. But after a couple months of us sending the money he called me and asked if we wanted to sign a lease. I believed it was God blessing our obedience.

Understand, the church doesn't need to apply for government grants, or dip into the community chest.

God wants to fund *His work* through *His people*.

He reserves for you and me - and for all believers in Jesus - the joys of giving and supporting His work!

Verse 8, **“We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.”**

Here's a beautiful principle - when you give money, or time, or support, or prayers to a missionary, or a pastor, or a church you're investing in that ministry.

You're becoming a partner in their work, and thus you're sharing in the spiritual rewards of their labors.

At the end of this past year, *you through your church*, gave to Christian ministry in New Zealand, Honduras, England - as a result you now share in the rewards of ministry in places that you've never personally been.

Verse 9, “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.” I read where the average American ate 68 hot dogs last year. That’s a lot of hot dogs... Well, Diotrephes didn’t eat hot dogs - *he was a hot dog!*

Diotrephes loved to bask in the limelight. He was always the center of attention. He loved being the star.

It reminds me of a comment Woodrow Wilson once said of an proud associate, “He was the only man I have ever known who could strut while sitting down.”

And Diotrephes could strut!

Here was a power-monger. He loved to be in control. He learned early on how to manipulate, and intimidate, and dominate. And when he came into the church he brought along this attitude. *Diotrephes the dictator.*

Diotrephes was the self-appointed church sheriff. He thought nothing should go on in his town, even in Jesus’ name, without his approval. And it was this lust for “*the preeminence*” that made Diotrephes jealous.

He was threatened by the ministry of other believers.

This is why Diotrephes refused to receive John.

Verse 10 tells us he made vicious slurs to discredit John the Elder. Diotrephes acted like the union boss, and he didn’t want John infringing on his turf.

Bible expositor, AT Robertson, once wrote an article for a Southern Baptist magazine. His story depicted the conduct of this man, Diotrephes, without naming him.

In the weeks following, 25 Baptist church leaders across the state wrote letters to the editor canceling their subscriptions to the magazine. They all claimed that Robertson had been pointing his finger at them.

Its sad, but the Church today is still plagued by Diotrephes. When a church develops a single boss it loses much of its blessing. When one man dictates to God's people - even to God - what can and can't be done - the work of the Spirit is grieved and quenched.

Jesus said in Matthew 20:25-27, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant... Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave..."

Christian leaders are to be *servants* not *sergeants* - *disciples* not *dictators*. It's been said the challenge of a leader is to "lead and not drive, inspire and not dominate, cause respect and not fear, win support and not opposition." There's only one Master - only one Boss for the believer - and His name is "*Jesus Christ!*"

Verse 10, "Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words." Diotrephes slanders those who threaten his position and power. He even told lies about John.

"And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church." Not only did Diotrephes oppose John. He opposed anyone else in the church who had tried to support John.

For Diotrephes it was *his way or the highway*.

Diotrephes didn't allow for a dissenting opinion. He made no room for people who disagreed with him. This was an arrogant man - a cult-leader in the making.

And notice what John says at the beginning of verse 10 - *when he comes, he'll put Diotrephes in his place!*

Don't you wish you could've been present for that encounter? Sparks will fly! John will put his foot down.

The Elder is about to put *the elitist* in his place!

“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.” Instead of a Diotrephes, be a Demetrius. Verse 12, “Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.”

Nothing is said of Demetrius other than he was a good example. He had *“a good testimony from all...”*

If we contrast him with Diotrephes, it implies that Demetrius was probably a humble, servant-leader.

Verse 13, “I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face.” This is also the problem with email. *Ever written an email that was misinterpreted?* Tone, and in flexion, and volume, and facial expressions are absent from an email.

Some messages - no matter how awkward or unpleasant - need to be conveyed face to face.

John concludes, “Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.” John has been reflecting on the love of Jesus. And remember what was said of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, “the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” When John tells them to greet his friends by name, he’s exemplifying the love of Jesus.

Jesus loves us personally, intimately, specifically.

You’ve heard the statement, “I love humanity. I just can’t stand people.” That’s not Jesus! **He loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love!**