

Last time we only just got started into 2 John,  
and we paused to consider “the elect lady and her children” –  
which reflects John’s understanding of the church.

But tonight we are looking at the teaching of John’s second epistle as a whole.  
And to understand what John is doing,  
look at verse 9.

In verse 9, John says:

*Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.*

The word for “go on ahead” – προαγων – means to “innovate.”

What does this mean?  
“to go ahead”?

John is plainly referring to the sorts of people he spoke about in his first epistle –  
those who went out from us because they were not of us!

But how do you know who is innovating?

The Reformation provides perhaps the most striking example!

Was Luther “going ahead”

in his “innovative” doctrine of justification by faith alone?

Or was he correct in saying that the late medieval practice of indulgences  
was a deadly innovation?

Today we love innovation!

If it’s new it must be better than the old!

And sometimes it’s true!

But how do you know what is innovation?

Notice that John tells us what is the opposite of “going on ahead” –  
abiding in the teaching of Christ.

Sure, there are difficult cases –

were the Cyrillians in the 5<sup>th</sup> century in Egypt *really* heretics?

who was “going” ahead in the 16<sup>th</sup> century on the Lord’s Supper?

where do you draw the line among 21<sup>st</sup> century African charismatics?

The way to find out is this: “are they abiding in the teaching of Christ?”

As Robert Yarbrough puts it,

“The challenge, then, is to follow John’s apostolic lead of discerning decline,  
of admonishing and encouraging and serving the faithful,  
and of continually recovering (‘abiding in’) the truth, faith, love, mercy,

peace, grace, and full range of other benefits – and commands – mediated by God’s Word in Christ.”

If you think back to John’s first epistle,  
if you see a community that is lacking in doctrinal belief,  
practical obedience,  
or love for God and brother,  
then you are seeing a community that is “innovating” –  
failing to abide in the word of Christ,  
either in word, in love, or in deed.

**Introduction: Love in Truth (v1-3)**

<sup>1</sup> *The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth,* <sup>2</sup> *because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:* <sup>3</sup> *Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father’s Son, in truth and love.*

Last time we looked at verses 1-3, in some detail.

John emphasizes the importance of the *truth*.

He uses the word “truth” (aletheia) five times in the first four verses.

There is no substitute for truth in the church.

The church (as Paul puts it) is the pillar and ground of the truth.

Notice the image here:

the church is that which truth is placed upon.

The church is not the *source* of truth.

The church cannot *create* truth.

Rather, the church is the place where truth (which has its source in God alone) is found.

The truth *abides* in us and will be with us forever,

because Jesus Christ *is* the truth – and he is with us forever!

In other words,

<sup>2</sup> John 1-3 set up his warning against innovation

by establishing the foundation of truth.

I love the church (the elect lady) and her children,

*in truth* – as do all who know the truth –

because of the *truth* that abides in us (namely, Jesus Christ).

But, as we’ve seen in 1 John many times –

the personal nature of truth in Jesus Christ

does not obscure its propositional character,

(or perhaps, better, its *confessional* character).

The truth as it is in Jesus  
is propositionally true: “Jesus Christ is the Son of God  
who came in the flesh and died and rose from the dead to save sinners”  
is a statement of historical fact;  
but believing this historical fact is not sufficient for salvation.  
The devil believes every word of it!

The truth as it is in Jesus  
is fundamentally a confessional truth:  
if we confess that Jesus is Lord –  
we must confess that this propositional truth  
is the truth that has come to dwell in our hearts.

And this is what it means to “walk in the truth” in verse 4:

**1. Joy/Concern: Some of Your Children Are Walking in the Truth (v4)**

<sup>4</sup> *I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.*

In verses 4-7 John expresses his joy that he has found some of the lady’s children walking in the truth.

This translation is accurate, but potentially misleading.

In English, the idea of “some” suggests that “others” are not walking in the truth. But a more literal rendering would be “I rejoiced greatly to find *of* your children” which could be translated “those of your children.”

In other words, as John is traveling –  
he has found “those of your children” who are here,  
who are walking in the truth.

John is *not* saying that he has found *some* of your children walking in the truth, while *others* are not!

Rather, he is saying that he has found *some* your children –  
and he rejoices they are walking in the truth!

So the concern expressed here is *not* that some of your children have strayed.

The concern is that she – and they – will become forgetful.

And so John wishes to remind “the dear lady” of the commandment that we have had from the beginning:

**a. What Is Love? Walking according to His Commandments (v5-6)**

<sup>5</sup> *And now I ask you, dear lady— not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning— that we love one another.*

In verse 5 John asks the dear lady that we love one another.

In one sense, this commandment is nothing new –

If you think back to Leviticus 19,  
we have had it from the beginning of Moses and the Law.  
If you think back to Matthew 22,  
we have had it from the beginning of Christ and the gospel.

But verse 6 goes a step further:

*<sup>6</sup>And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.*

Walk in what?

Greek has grammatical gender, so each noun and pronoun  
is either masculine, feminine, or neuter.  
The pronoun “it” is feminine here,  
so that should help, right?

Only one problem:

not only is *love* feminine,  
but so is commandment (and “beginning” for that matter)!

So are you supposed to walk in love? Or in the commandment?  
You could argue for either one.

I find it decisive that verse 6 has a mini-chiasm:

Love – walk – commandments – commandment – walk –  
so what is the “it”?

This is love –  
that we walk according to his commandments  
this is the commandment  
so that you should walk in love.

In other words:

Love one another is *the* commandment.

Now, this is curious.

Because in Deuteronomy 6, Moses is very clear that “the” commandment is  
Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and strength.

But here in 2 John 6 we are told that “the commandment” is  
“love one another.”

How can this be?

Some might say that John “assumes” the great commandment –  
but that would be perilous!

Does John merely assume that God’s people will remember to love him  
and so tells them to focus entirely on loving each other?

No.

I would suggest that John's theology of the incarnation  
has a far more radical implication!

For John, the fact (the propositional, historical, confessional truth) of the incarnation  
has brought about a new theological state of affairs.

Since the Word has become flesh –  
since the Son of God has become man –  
therefore the command to love the Lord our God  
and the command to love our neighbor  
have merged together in Jesus Christ.

When you love Jesus, which commandment do you obey?  
Are you loving the Lord your God?  
Or are you loving your neighbor?

He is true God and true man (1 John 5:20) –  
and so when you love Jesus, you fulfill both the great commandments!

And since Jesus Christ is *the truth* which abides in us,  
when you love one another,  
you are fulfilling both commands as well

You can see the importance of the confessional aspect of this command in verse 7:

**b. Antichrist: Those Who Do Not Confess the Coming of Christ in the  
Flesh (v7)**

*<sup>7</sup>For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming  
of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.*

We looked at the identity of antichrist in 1 John 2 as well.

Here John again identifies antichrist  
as those who deny the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.

Notice that for John, the antichrist is not especially a “future” figure,  
but one who is present today.

There are many deceivers – and by extension, many antichrists –  
who have “gone out into the world.”

Gone out from where?  
From the church!

Deceivers and antichrists (false messiahs) arise from within the church.  
They do not remain with us because they are not of us –

they are (like Simon Magus in Acts 8) foreign growths in the church.  
Simon Magus, Valentinus, Marcion –  
these were the arch-heretics who produced Gnostic theology,  
a view that denied that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh.  
They claimed to believe in Jesus –  
and they accepted parts of the apostles’ teaching,  
but they denied the doctrine of the incarnation.

And so Simon Magus, Valentinus, and Marcion were properly called  
the deceiver and the antichrist.

Their doctrines have continued in various forms to this day –  
you can find them in the Muslims, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses of today.  
And you can find their views in certain circles in mainline Protestantism –  
particularly among those who deny the Virgin Birth  
and the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

In many ways, the PCA exists today because the mainline Presbyterian church  
permitted antichrists to remain as ordained ministers in the church.

One of the clearest examples in recent years is the Episcopal bishop,  
John Shelby Spong.

Bishop Spong claims that Jesus was merely a man who died and stayed dead.  
But the disciples had a tremendous experience after the death of Jesus  
that they later referred to as the resurrection of Jesus.  
But, Spong says,  
“Paul did not envision the Resurrection as Jesus being restored to life in this world  
but as Jesus being raised into God.  
It was not an event in time but a transcendent and transforming truth.”  
(<http://johnshelbyspong.com/sample-essays/the-resurrection/>)

This is precisely the sort of “failure of confession” that John warns against!  
This is age-old Gnosticism arising in new form  
claiming that history does not matter –  
what matters is our experience.

John says that this is the deceiver and the antichrist.

Verses 8-9 then help us understand what to *do* about this:

**2. Warning: Watch Yourselves that You May Abide in the Teaching of Christ  
(v8-9)**

<sup>8</sup>*Watch yourselves,*

Look at yourselves – keep an eye on yourselves –  
*so that you may not lose what we have worked for,*

*but may win a full reward.*

Does it sound strange that John talks about “working”  
to “win a full reward”?

The concept of “reward” is frequently used in the NT –  
and is especially connected with “doing good”:

Jesus says in Matthew 10:42,

“whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water  
because he is a disciple, truly I say to you,  
he will by no means lose his reward.”

And in Luke 6:35,

“Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return,  
and your reward will be great...”

And Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:14,

“If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives,  
he will receive a reward.”

In many other places there are passages that speak of God repaying  
“everyone for what he has done” whether good or bad (Rev. 22:12 etc.).

God’s judgment is not *based* on your works –  
your works are not the *reason* why you inherit eternal life.  
The basis of God’s judgment is the righteousness of Christ,  
imputed to you in your justification.

But good works are the *necessary subsequent conditions* of justification.  
They are necessary – since without holiness, no one will see the Lord!  
They are subsequent – since we are only able to obey *after* God saves us!  
And they are conditions – since it is not possible to have a living and active faith  
without then *doing* what God says!

Therefore, good works are the necessary subsequent conditions of justification,  
and so John can say (with the rest of the scriptures):

<sup>8</sup>*Watch yourselves,  
so that you may not lose what we have worked for,  
but may win a full reward.*

If you would receive the full reward –  
eternal life –  
then be attentive to yourselves.

But what does this look like?

Consider verse 9:

<sup>9</sup>*Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.*

The teaching of Christ is what we should abide in –  
and whoever abides in this teaching has both the Father and the Son.

But *everyone who goes on ahead*  
does not have God.

Now, of course, it would be really easy to get carried away here!

Everyone who goes on ahead –  
does this mean Rome with its novel doctrines of Purgatory,  
the immaculate conception of Mary,  
and the infallibility of the Pope?  
Does this mean Constantinople with their novelty  
of the doctrine of Icons,  
or does this mean Baptists  
who innovated with their doctrine of believer's baptism only?  
Or you could point to Martin Luther  
with his "going ahead" in promulgating justification by faith alone;  
or the Reformed  
with their innovative doctrine of reprobation

But notice the shift in perspective in these questions!

All these questions – regarding Rome, Baptists, Lutherans, etc. –  
focus on the question of going on ahead of *the church*.

John, however, does not concern himself with the "teaching of the church,"  
but with those who go on ahead, and do not "abide in the teaching of Christ."

Now, John would certainly object to any church whose teaching  
did not abide in the teaching of Christ! –  
but unfortunately, this is precisely what we have seen in church history!

But for John, the teaching of Christ stands above all churches.

John declares his love for "the elect lady" and her children.  
He loves the church.

But the church is not the *source* of the teaching of Christ.

The church's teaching does not *determine* what is the teaching of Christ –  
the church's teaching must *abide* in the teaching of Christ!

And this is why you must "watch yourselves" –

because there is no guarantee that the church will always get it right!

John's warning here reminds us that there are times when error and heresy prevail.  
There are times when the deceiver and the antichrist  
are bishops in the church.

Verse 10 seems to assume as much:

**3. Admonition: Do Not Receive False Teachers into Your House (v10-11)**

*<sup>10</sup>If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, <sup>11</sup>for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.*

Verses 10-11 focus on the place of hospitality in the church.

False teachers – antichrists – should not be welcome in your home  
(or in the church!).

The picture seems to be something like this:

A teacher comes to town – think of Paul, or Apollos, or John himself!  
We might think it would have been easy in the days of the apostles –  
but it is worth remembering that in the first century  
the “apostles” had only their own word to recommend them!  
When “the apostle John” comes to town,  
what reason do you have to believe him?  
Because he says “I am an eyewitness of Jesus”?

Why should you care!?

You have no authoritative writings to decide the question!

So how do you know what to do with this “teacher” who comes to town?

You judge according to “the teaching of Christ” –  
the apostolic witness that you have heard from the apostles.  
The “teaching of Christ” is the canon – the standard –  
by which all other teachers are judged.

John's teaching here utterly repudiates the “two-source” idea of tradition.

In the middle ages, everyone agreed that the apostolic teaching was the sole authority,  
but some argued that you found apostolic teaching in two places:  
scripture and the oral tradition of the church,  
so that “official church teaching” was equally authoritative with scripture  
(this is the view that results in an infallible church or an infallible pope).

But John does not say that the teaching of the elect lady  
(or the teaching of the bishop of Rome, for that matter)  
is the authoritative standard.

Rather, he says that the teaching of *Christ* is the authoritative standard.

In other words, the authoritative standard (for John)

is something that remains *outside* of the church.

The teaching of Christ – the Word of God –  
stands over the church, and judges/evaluates *every* claim to Christian teaching.

So when a teacher comes to town,  
you listen to his teaching –  
and if you do not hear “this teaching”  
do not receive him into your house!

Now I should point out the assumption here:  
if he does bring “this teaching”  
then you *should* receive him into your house!

John assumes that Christians will practice hospitality –  
love of strangers –  
and especially towards traveling ministers of the gospel.

Likewise, the “greeting” that is spoken of here  
is more than just saying “hello.”  
Christian greetings include recognizing one another as true Christians.  
If you greet the false teacher as a Christian,  
then you are sharing in his teaching (in his “wicked works”).  
You cannot love your brethren *and* share in the wicked works of antichrist! [DB!]

As Robert Yarbrough puts it,  
“he has in mind aiding and abetting people who are undercutting  
apostolic doctrine and leadership as represented by John.” (351)

You may be polite to Mormon missionaries,  
but you should not do anything to aid them.

They are messengers of antichrist.

If you follow another teaching beside the teaching of Christ,  
then you separate yourself not only from Christ, but from God himself.

### **Conclusion (v12-13)**

<sup>12</sup> *Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.*

<sup>13</sup> *The children of your elect sister greet you.*

John concludes by saying that he has more to write,  
but that he will not use paper and ink –  
but rather that he will talk with them face to face.  
(literally, “mouth to mouth”)

You may think “mouth to mouth” is a strange phrase –  
since “mouth to mouth” in English  
refers to a way of reviving someone who is not breathing!

But talking face to face is just as odd!  
Faces don’t talk – mouths do!

And John says that he hopes to talk with them mouth to mouth  
“so that our joy may be complete.”

We find joy in the mouth to mouth correspondence that we have with one another.  
Many of the sweetest moments in my life have come with fellow Christians  
as we speak together of the glory of Christ,  
and the wondrous works that he has done!

Is it purely an intellectual enjoyment?  
I hope not!

Speaking of the glory of God and the power of his Spirit and the majesty of his Son  
is an expression of our fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
We find *joy* in speaking together –  
in our fellowship with one another, which expresses our fellowship with God.

The reason why we have bible studies and other fellowship times in the church  
is not just so that we can “learn” what man is to believe concerning God  
and what duty God requires of man –  
but also so that we glorify and enjoy God himself in these things!

I said at the beginning of the 1 John series that the Shorter Catechism answer 3  
seemed to be missing the “abiding” “loving” side of 1 John.

But the reason for that, as I realized upon further reflection,  
is because the catechism has put the abiding/loving/enjoying aspect  
at the very heart of everything else:

Man’s chief end is to *glorify* God and *enjoy* him forever  
(there is the abiding/loving)  
question three then puts the believing and the obeying  
as subcategories of the glorifying and enjoying of him.