

The Doctrine of Christ; The Commandment of Christ

Text:

II John

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, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. 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. 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. 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. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. 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. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

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. The children of your elect sister greet you.

Introduction:

We have begun a journey through John's First Epistle. Last time we took a passage that demonstrates John's perspective. He sees the world through God's saving acts in Jesus Christ. For John "the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining." That true light is Jesus Christ, who by his death and resurrection has completely transformed human history. Living on this side of the coming of the light into the world we cannot live as if the light did not exist. It does, and it makes all things new. Our calling as Christians is to "walk in the light, as he is in the

light. In fact, the First Epistle of John is an exposition of what it means to walk or live in the light of Christ. As we work our way through First John we will be attempting to see what it means to walk in the light of Christ.

Before we take up the rest of the text of I John, however, I want us to examine II and III John. These are the two shortest books in the Bible. They are so short (about half a printed page each) that it is easy to overlook them. I doubt that most Christians could pass a pop quiz over them. Their value for us as we seek to answer this question: “What does John mean by walking in the light of Christ?” is that they give concrete illustrations of the truth laid down in the Gospel of John and the First Epistle. These are true letters. They would have filled one normal sheet of papyrus. The first, II John, is written to a church, and the second, III John, is written to an individual who is a leader in a church. We don’t know if this is the same church or two separate churches. Churches were small and met in houses in the 1st century. We do know that they were churches in the region of Ephesus; that John had had an important part in their founding and leadership, and that he was a respected leader.

We can also deduce from the content of the three epistles that these churches had serious disagreements about important issues and that they were on the verge of dividing. Some had already left, and John is writing to strengthen those who remain and to encourage them to persevere in truth and in love. These are the two major themes of all three epistles. As we work our way through them we will come back to them repeatedly.

We do not know the history of how these letters were written and delivered. Their contents, however give us some clues that help us make a reasonable reconstruction. In both II and III John, John closes with the same statement: “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”. These are short letters written to prepare personal visits. We could wish that he had written all he had to say to them. It would be enriching and enlightening for us, but he didn’t. The matter was far too serious to handle with a letter. On the other hand, what most likely is true is that much of what he had to say to them is contained in I John, which is not really a letter, but more like a written sermon or a handbook on the Christian life.

The reason I wanted to look at II and III John before I John was to see that the truth laid down in I John was written in a specific context. This is always the case in the N.T. writings. All of the documents in the New Testament were written to real people in real places who were facing real problems. We live our lives as Christians in a specific place and time. We must face specific issues and problems. As we see in II John the truth doesn’t change. In his greeting John says that the truth that abides in us will be with us forever. The truth that John insists on throughout all of his writings is eternal and unchanging, but that truth confronts individuals of different times, places and cultures. Just at the Christians of Ephesus in the 1st century had to

learn to walk in the eternal light of Christ so we in our time must do the same. Just as they were in danger of being led astray by deceivers who had come among them and losing what they had worked for, so we too run the risk of being misled and deviating from the true light that is Christ. So in this short letter John writes to warn us to “watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.”

He warns us in respect to two things: (1) the doctrine of or the teaching about Christ, and (2) the commandments of or teachings of Christ

I. The Doctrine of Christ

What has been put at risk by the false teacher is not something nonessential and marginal, but the very heart and center of the Christian Faith. All three of these letters major only on majors. This is the reason John refers to the false teachers as antichrists. Their teaching is contrary to the Gospel. They are denying Christ in two very important ways. First they are denying his person. They are identifying him as someone other than who he is. He says that the deceivers “do not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” The early Christian centuries developed many errors about the identity of Jesus Christ that we refer to as Christological heresies. It is not necessary to discuss them here or to even try to deduce exactly what heresy about the person of Jesus Christ was being taught by these deceivers and antichrists. What is important for us to realize is that we must not allow ourselves to be misled. Only Christ as he truly is can save us and help us. A Christ of our own invention is no more than a figment of our imagination and has no power to redeem and transform us. No question is ever more important than the question: “Who is Jesus Christ?”

This is the reason John is so severe in his treatment of these false teachers. This is why he says: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works”. By the way he is saying this to the church. He says “do not receive him into your house” because churches met in houses. Today this is the verse from II John that people are most likely to know, and they generally take it to mean that we should not let anyone in our house that is teaching a false doctrine. That is a good idea and we probably would do best on most occasions to follow that rule, but what John is referring to here is allowing them to teach in our churches. We must be very careful to guard the Gospel. We must make sure that all that we teach about Jesus Christ and what he has done for us is first true, and secondly clear. It is our solemn obligation to be witnesses of Jesus Christ, and the Christ to whom we bear witness must be the Christ of the New Testament and the Apostles, the eternal Son of God who became flesh and dwelled

among us; who gave his life for us and who rose victorious over death. This is the Christ who saves, transforms, and gives us genuine hope of eternal life.

II. The Commandments of Christ

The truth of Christ is not just the truth about who he is. It is also the truth that he taught. To be a Christian is not just to believe the truth about who Jesus is, it is also to walk in or live by the truth that he taught. John says to these 1st century believers and to us: “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. 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” (verses 5, 6). To walk in the light is to walk according to the commandments of Christ, and chief among those commandments is Christ’s new commandment to “love one another as I have loved you.”

In Third John we will see an example of an individual who is walking according to the commandments of Christ and one who is not. John is not writing theoretically. He is dealing with the concrete reality of life. Christ teaches the way of love, but it is not always easy for his followers to love. Sometimes we fail miserably, but his commandments do not change. It is our duty to always be searching the way of love as we have already seen whoever says that he abides in Christ must walk as he walked.

The great beauty of John’s writings is that they are simple and direct. They take us to the heart of what is essential, and what is essential is that we must believe in Christ as he is and follow him as he taught. If we do diligence to do these two things the rest will follow.