

- ***READ II John*** Human intuition often tells us that the larger a thing is...the greater it is. This type of thinking can even creep into our minds when it comes to different writings within the Bible. We think of larger writings such as the Pentateuch, the Psalter, and the Major Prophets as being the most important sections of the Old Testament. We think of Matthew, Luke, Acts, Romans, the Corinthian letters, Hebrews, and Revelation as being the most important in the New Testament simply because they are longer and contain the most inspired writings. This leaves smaller works such as many of the Epistles as not receiving as much notoriety simply because they are so much smaller.
- However, I noticed as I read through II & III John that though these letters are small...they contain writings that are vitally important to those who first received them and us as we continue to look at them two thousand years later. John, the same man who wrote the Gospel of John and the Revelation, authored three shorter letters with some very important ideas in mind, and those ideas center around the fact that John deeply cared for those whom he was writing to. In both letters, John tells the recipients that he has a deep love for them in truth, and it shouldn't surprise us that these two letters focus on very similar ideas. Some have referred to these letters as twin letters, but they shouldn't be viewed as identical for they have enough differences to fit into the fraternal twin category.
- Be that as it may, our study for this evening will focus on these two short letters and the strong and important messages that are found within each of them. John is writing to brethren that he loves, and that love compels him to write these important reminders that would help these brethren to be people that were thriving in both love and truth. These truths continue to be necessary even for us today, and we can grow in both love and truth if we will give careful consideration to what John writes here within these two short letters.

Short Letters With Strong Messages

I. John found joy in these brethren. (II:4 & III:2-4)

- A. These two letters were sent to two different locations, but each of the recipients were a cause of great joy within the mind of John. **II John** gives us an unusual term of address as John writes to *"the elect lady and her children."* I tend to lean towards this being a description of a particular local church and the disciples that make her up. Feminine pronouns can be found elsewhere when the church is being described. (**Ephesians 5**) **III John** is addressed to a single person who is named Gaius. This was a common name in Romans times, so we are quite unsure of anything concerning this man apart from him being the recipient of this letter.
- B. Nonetheless, it is said in both letters that John was made *"very glad"* by what he had heard concerning these two recipients. What made him glad was what he heard concerning their *"walking in truth"* and *"fidelity to the truth."* Both recipients are commended for their faithfulness to the commands of God that they had received. Again, we are not sure of the relationship between John and these recipients, but there was a close enough established relationship that John had that deep joy for their faithfulness. He even addresses the good prosperity and health that has been experienced by Gaius. Gaius obviously was seen as a spiritual child to John since John states, *"I have no greater joy than this: to hear that my children are walking in the truth."*
- C. Anyone who has experienced a parent/child relationship or something similar to it certainly understands the great joy that is felt when those who are our "children" are receptive to the teachings we deliver to them and act upon them. We recognize that John stated that only "some" of her children were walking in truth, but that didn't stop his joy from being realized. It can be very easy for us to focus on the negative that is within our lives, but John, in this instance,

chose to focus on the faithfulness of some over the unfaithfulness of others. This choice allows for the faithful to be encouraged instead of thinking they are being overlooked. John rejoiced over the faithfulness of his brethren, and we would do well to imitate this good example because I believe that it does encourage greater and sustained faithfulness. People are often motivated to continue in good behavior when that good behavior is recognized and appreciated. John loved and joy in these brethren because of their faithfulness to truth and we ought to be sure to appreciate those around us who are committed to the same faith and truth.

II. John expected love for others. (II:5 & III:5,6)

- A. John expected for the love that he had for these brethren to be passed along to others that they might interact with. II John indicates that this expectation wasn't something that ought to be seen as new for it was a command that had been expected of disciples from the very beginning. In fact, this command for them to be a people of love was given straight from the mouth of Jesus in **John 13:34**. It should be no surprise to us then that John would focus greatly on this need within the lives of disciples in all three of his shorter letters. **I John 3-5** focus on the subject of love and it is also found with these two shorter letters. The love that these brethren were to have for one another would allow for them to have fellowship with God. (**I John 4:20,21**)
- B. Gaius seems to have been a man who had been practicing such love towards brothers and sisters. The way that John was able to find out about Gaius's faithfulness was through others who told him about how Gaius had acted faithfully towards his brothers and sisters...even those who were strangers to him. This tells us that Gaius was a man who practiced true hospitality in its purest form...so much so that others were willing to testify to his love before the church.
- C. While we don't show love towards others for the purpose of making ourselves look good or to receive good compliments from others, it is a good thing for us to behave in such a way that others are aware of the love that we have for others. It is a tight line to walk, but as long as we are keeping our motivations pure then we will do as God would have for us to do, and we will be fulfilling the expectations of this inspired writer for these recipients and all others who wear the name of Jesus Christ as disciples.

III. John expected love for truth. (II:6 & III:7,8,11,12)

- A. John also expected for these brethren to be people who had a deep abiding love for the truths of God. Within these two letters, we read of our love for truth being manifested in at least three different ways. In **II John**, John seems to commend these brethren for their love of truth that was seen through the way that they were walking according to His commandments. If believed that Jesus was God and therefore the essence of truth, then they would have to be obedient to His commandments if they wanted to maintain that they had a love for truth. It would be illogical to acknowledge Jesus as the Giver of truth and then turn around and behave as if His commands were not necessary to follow or obey. Thankfully, they were walking according to His commandments and therefore walking in love for the truth. **III John** also mentions a man named Demetrius who also appears to have been a man that was committed to a love for the truth. *"Everyone speaks well of Demetrius—even the truth itself. And we also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true."*
- B. Secondly in **III John**, John attaches to his commendations for Gaius's love of others the fact that those whom he had supported were coworkers with the truth. By him being willing to take them in, care for them, and hopefully sending them on their way in a worthy manner...he was directly supporting the truth that they were striving to uphold. This particular aspect of this letter will come into play again in just a few moments when we look at the third way that a love for truth can be made evident within the lives of disciples.

- C. Before we get to that third way, I want us to take a moment to consider whether or not we are loving truth as we ought to? Are we showing ourselves as being lovers of truth through obedience to the commands that have been given by Jesus? Are we willing to humble ourselves before Jesus in order to follow whatever commands He has given us in His Word?
- D. Further, are we willing to support those who are busy about the work of sharing the truth with others? Are we willing to offer words of encouragement when we see them working hard to learn so that they might teach more fully the Word of Truth? Are we seeking to encourage them when they push us and challenge us in places in our lives where we need to be pushed and challenged, or will we be hard-hearted by making their work more difficult? If we want to be people who are truly loving truth then we must be certain to focus on obedience to Jesus's commandments and uphold those who are working to support the truth.

IV. John expected the rejection of false teachers and wicked men. (II:7-11 & III:9-12)

- A. To finish our last way in which we can support the truth...we can do so by not supporting those who promote falsehoods or cause issues for the people of God. These issues are seen twice within these short letters. In **II John**, John is once again addresses the issue of some who were denying that Jesus had come in the flesh. This is an issue that he had to address in **I John 4:1-3**, and it seems to have continued to be an issue for the recipients of this letter. John's teaching on this issue was clear and to the point. Those who did not come to them with the correct teaching of Jesus being both fully God and fully man were to be rejected. If anyone supported them in this false teaching then they would only be sharing in the evil works of false teachers.
- B. False teachers didn't seem to be the issue for Gaius, but instead he had the issue of a particular man within the church, Diotrephes, who thought that he deserved to have first place among the rest of the disciples. He also rejected the the authority of Jesus's Apostles by slandering them with malicious words. His rejection of the authority of the Apostles is actually a rejection of the authority of Jesus since He set them up to lead the church following His departure to heaven. He seems to have wanted all of the power and influence within this church, and he sought to control this power by refusing to welcome fellow believers and even kicked some out of the church! This is the exact opposite behavior that was commented by John of Gaius as he welcomed brethren and supported them. John seems none to pleased with Diotrephes and looks forwards to coming among them and reminding him of his evil deeds. His instructions to these disciples is for them to reject the evil that might be among then and hold fast to and imitate that which is good.
- C. Again, these expectations of John for these brethren are expected of us. Are we knowledgeable and strong enough to reject false teachings when we hear them? Not that we should be hateful, but are we able to recognize that which is contrary to truth and take a strong stand against it? When someone among us seeks to take control of all of the power in the church, will we cower in fear or will be stand strong against such wickedness and hold fast to what is good and the will of God. If we what to be people who love the truth then we must be willing and able to take a stand against that which is false and contrary to God's will.

While this letter might not have been written directly to us...I am still very much convinced that John's desires and expectations for these brethren would be true for us because he would love us in truth in much the same way as our brother. Further, John loved the recipients of this letter to the point that he had no desire to write to the again. Instead, he hoped to see them face to face so that his joy might be made even more complete. Friends, I believe that it is John's desire that he see us face to face, as well. That will never happen in this life, so we must be sure that we are busy living faithfully so that we might see the faithful writer John face to face in heaven or in eternity. May we be busy as we go throughout this week being committed to both love and truth.