

EPISTLES OF JOHN

Part 6
(II John 1-13 – III John 1-14)

A Series of Radio Messages

by

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II John 1-4

The Second Epistle of John is one of the small and the more unfamiliar portions of Scripture. In the New Testament there are five books that are associated with the name of John. Almost everyone knows the Gospel of John. The Gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Many people think that is the end of whatever would be given to the name of John. But we find the three Epistles of John. Second and Third John are short letters. One has thirteen Verses and the other has fourteen verses. They are both written to individuals. The first one was apparently written to a woman in the congregation that he served, and the second one was written to a man in the congregation where John had been. The fifth book of John is the Book of the Revelation. Some people question whether it is the same John each time, but this is not important at this time. Actually the material in these books is very much like each other and there is evidence that the same line of thought is in each one.

Second John begins with the introduction, "The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever." No names are mentioned, but this could be just a personal taste on the part of the author. The word *truth* is used three times in this first sentence. We read in the third verse "Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father." In this short portion of four verses we have the word *truth* coming over and over again.

The writer speaks of himself as the elder. In the New Testament the elder is a person who has some responsibility of teaching, of guiding others. The New Testament uses two words interchangeably. The word *episcopus* from which we get the word *bishop*, which is reflected in the term *episcopal* and the word *presbyter* which we translate the word *elder*. The word *episcopus* means the overseer and the word *elder* means the older man. Sometimes a man might be called a bishop and another time he might be called an elder: Apparently it would be the same man that was in mind.

The early church looked to certain persons among them for leadership. Such persons were usually men with experience. They were elder in the sense they were mature. These men who were more mature exercised an oversight over the other members of the congregation. They were spoken of as being under-shepherds. They did the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in a pastoral sense, having care for the spiritual welfare of the members of the church who were younger and less experienced than they. John recognized himself in this capacity. He is a teaching leader in the church.

John writes to the elect lady and her children. The word elect possibly means chosen and probably refers to the fact that she was a woman of some consequence. She probably did not have any particular position, but was one of the outstanding Christians in the group. At any rate the letter was written to this woman and her children. One wonders whether this was a widow woman with her family. Evidently it was some family that he knew well, for we read "the elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth." John makes this woman and her family feel he is really interested in them.

In this short epistle the writer warns against following unsound teaching. He sends a special message to this woman and her family that they be careful not to follow false leaders. So we can understand his positive accent upon truth. He says that he loves them in the truth. This would be loving them as fellow believers. The term *love you* does not mean that he liked them in any special way. This is not emphasizing that when he was with them he was very, very glad of their company because they were just the kind of people he was, the way we often use that word love. Rather, this is love in the New Testament

sense and in the spiritual sense meaning we are interested in the welfare of the other person.

When he says, "Whom I love in the truth" he is saying, a person in whose welfare I am definitely interested. "And not I only, but also they that have known the truth." John is reminding her that she is a proper concern for all the congregation, or all the others who have known the truth. The word *truth* in these four verses is used so broadly that it could well mean the Gospel itself. It would mean the truth about Jesus Christ . . . all that Jesus Christ means to us. We could say "whom I love in the truth that is in Jesus Christ, and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth." What is this truth in Christ Jesus? Let us keep in mind this means that God comes into the human being in grace and mercy to recreate in him a new creature in Christ. Then God works in him to will and to do of His good pleasure. God's grace and mercy actually works in the individual believer to help him live his life to his own blessing and to the praise and glory of God. This is one way of describing the truth as is in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever." John lays down what he is going to say later. He is sending her this letter on behalf of the Gospel for the sake of the truth which dwelleth in us and shall be with us forever. And then comes the usual salutation we get in many apostolic letters. "Grace be with you, mercy, and peace." Grace is God doing something for us we do not deserve, or God giving us favor we have not earned. Mercy is God's kindness to us at a time when we could be at fault. "The peace of God which passeth all understanding," God gives to those who put their trust in Him. So John prays "Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." When John speaks about God it is from God the Father, not God the creator, or the Almighty. It is not God, the Lord of all nations, but God, the Father. Grace and mercy and peace are to come to us from God the Father. As long as we are in that relationship with God where we are children and He is our Father then grace, mercy and peace will be with us.

"And from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father." John has referred to the Lord Jesus Christ by His whole title . . . the Lord of all. He is Jesus, the one who died for us and saves us. He is Christ, the one whom God sent to do this work. But "the son of the Father, emphasizes the sonship of Jesus Christ. It is the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son and this grace is to be to you from Jesus Christ in His relationship with the Father as the Son in truth and love. "In truth" is according to the way God has it planned.

"I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father." John expresses his words of appreciation and commendation to this mother because in her family he has found her children walking in truth. He found them living their life in a relationship with God which comes from recognizing that Jesus the Christ is Savior and that in Him we belong to God and God belongs to us.

II John 5-7

The last book in the New Testament is the Book of Revelation. Just before it is the Book of Jude which is a book of one chapter. Before Jude are three short books that carry the name of John – I John, II John and III John. First John has five chapters, Second John has one chapter and Third John has one chapter. These are short letters written by John to certain persons. The first few verses cover John's appreciation that "the elect lady" and her children were walking in truth. John would have her know that his own interest in her and in her family was all in the truth. John evidently was putting emphasis upon the word truth because the whole letter is a warning. He warns them not to follow men who are not telling the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ. Many times we have this expression, "the truth and love." In the third verse of II John is "Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love."

After having emphasized truth in the first four verses John lays emphasis upon the reality of love. The truth of God leads us into love for God and for man. "And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another." We try to work things out that are the best for each other. "And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." Discussions about the truth of the Gospel often become just a lot of talk that develop or degenerate into argument. Argument can become involved because words are so slippery. One person holds them one way. Another person holds them another. Words are many sided. Often a person will say one thing that makes sense to him but to the other person does not make sense at all. A good argument starts and becomes personal and moves on into heat. Many times in the course of these arguments we have far more heat than light. Emotions are aroused and the misunderstanding is not cleared up. It is a notorious feature of much that is in the field of religion. So much so that many people lay down a rule never to argue religion. They have seen a good deal of harm come with practically no benefit to anyone. It is no wonder then that John says the real basic truth is that we love one another.

Remember the phrase "Love one another" does not mean that we need to like one another. It would be wonderful if we could like each other but we do not. The only person we like is the person who is like us. People, being as different as they are, do not like one another. However, there is no reason why they could not love one another.

Love is not a matter of sentiment . . . how we feel. Love is what we do and we can do for other people. "This is love," we read in verse six, "that we walk after his commandments." Walking in love is walking in humble, simple obedience to the guidance of the living Lord. How is that love? It is love because we are doing what is pleasing in the sight of God. What is pleasing in the sight of God is helpful to other men because God loves people and wants to help them. If I do what God wants me to do I will do no one any harm. If I do what God wants me to do I will be doing things that will actually help other people. "Walking after his commandments" is simply walking in the Lord, obeying the Lord Jesus Christ, letting the Holy Spirit show us His way. These commandments that He will show us are not the ones pressed out like the ten commandments, but they are the inward guidances. We walk according to His inward guidance, according to the way in which He leads us.

If I want to help a man I would help him the way the Lord Jesus leads me to act toward him. There are times we do not know what is best for a man. We might see a man in a certain situation and think what that man needs is money. Actually what that man may need is friendship. Perhaps what that man needs is some advice. Maybe he needs guidance of some sort. How would we know? Which one of these things

would we do? The Lord Jesus would lead us. We may have children or young people in our home. Do we love them? Loving them does not mean we always let them have their own way. Loving them means we try to guide them. It means we help them understand what they ought to do. It means we are faithful to them in not approving something that is less than what they could do.

This is love. This is how it works out when we walk according to the commandments of the Lord. This is love. Here is an example of how love works when we walk according to the commandments of the Lord. If a child is sick, his mother does everything she can to help nurse him back to health. In this case the child may be so sick he is under doctors' care and taken to the hospital. The mother comes to the hospital. She wants to help. But doctors won't let mothers help except in certain ways. The intelligent mother who wants to help her child will follow the doctor's orders. Whatever the doctor tells her to do is exactly what she will do. She might feel like picking up the child. She might have an urge to take him outside. But the doctor has told her to leave the child alone. She will leave the child alone. She might like to give the child something to eat – an ice cream cone. The child might enjoy this and it would give the mother great pleasure to see the child enjoy himself. But the doctor knows the child is too sick to have ice cream cones. If she really loves the child she will follow the doctor's order and resist her impulse to get an ice cream cone. "This is love that we walk after His commandments." We do what God wants us to do. He knows best.

"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." When we say that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" we mean that God's way of doing things was manifested in Jesus Christ. He walked in obedience to God. If we believe in Him His Spirit is in us and He moves us to walk in obedience. The pattern of Jesus Christ is actually the pattern of the truth. Anyone who does not say that, John says is antichrist.

II John 8-13

The popular notion that it makes no difference what a person believes just so he is sincere can be most misleading. John deals with this idea in his letter to "the elect lady and her children" that we call Second John. He is anxious to point out that it does make a difference whom we fellowship with, the kind of person that we endorse with our good will and with our friendship. As long as a person is teaching the Bible we think he is all right. Sometimes people have the idea that if a person is teaching the Sunday School class that everything that he says is the truth. There is such a general feeling of widespread liberty we allow each other that we almost think it is wrong to check up on what a person says or teaches. But if in our understanding of the Gospel and the Christian life we understand a Christian to be a person who believes in Jesus Christ then it does make a difference what he believes. What we believe depends upon what we hear; what we hear depends upon what someone is teaching. It all goes back to the teacher. This forces us to be careful as to what is being taught.

In the eighth verse we read, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." Look to yourselves means to take care about our personal relationships. John felt that the work he had done in teaching the Gospel to them and leading them to where they were in their faith could well now be lost if they were to turn to some other way of doing things. Look to yourselves, that we who have been already working among you lose not those things which we have wrought. Our efforts and our work goes for nothing because you are led in some other direction; "That we receive a full reward" would refer to the fact that we might get full results of what we are doing. It would be very easy to be misled. Real loss can occur if we are led away from the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." Ordinarily when we use the word transgression we think of somebody stepping out of bounds, or stepping back from what he ought to do. In this particular case the language seems to imply the person who goes beyond what he is taught. He is not staying within the teaching that there is in Christ Jesus – he hath not God. Many times people begin their Christian life by reading, studying and believing the Bible. Then someone proposes that he knows more than what is in the Bible. He suggests the Bible is all right for a start but we can go beyond until we arrive at positions which the Bible does not present. This is transgressing in the way in which John speaks. "Whosoever transgresseth (or goes beyond what there is in the Gospel), abideth not in the doctrine of Christ (is not actually staying in the teaching that is in Christ Jesus), hath not God." The doctrine of Christ would be the kind of teaching that would be based upon a personal living relationship with Almighty God. It is difficult to detect what a teacher has in mind or heart. We can only tell by what he says. We can ask ourselves, does he say the things that imply he is personally in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Does he encourage us to look personally into the face of the Lord Jesus Christ? Does he walk hand in hand with Christ. Or by any chance does the person think that the Lord Jesus Christ lived nineteen hundred years ago and just left His pattern for us to follow as we see fit? This second line of teaching is different from the first and it is what John has in mind that we should be careful not to follow.

"He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, hath both the Father and the Son." Here is a person who is in such personal relationship with his Father that at any time wherever he is, on the seashore, on the hilltop, anywhere, he can lift up his face to heaven and say, Our Father. He is in personal contact with the living God. The soul that lives this way, that hath this doctrine of Christ; hath both the Father and the Son. That person has fellowship with God as Father and with Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Jesus is functioning in him as the Son of God and inclining that person to look toward God as Father.

Verse ten gives the warning, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him

not into your house, neither bid him God speed." This is a strong admonition and it is given to everyone of us. We are to have nothing to do with anyone who offers another gospel than what is based on the living Jesus Christ. "For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." We need to take this to our hearts and minds very seriously. When I encourage another man to go on teaching, even though I know he is not teaching the truth, I am partially responsible for what that man does. I am a partaker with him of his evil deeds. He may be teaching that you and I should go out and try to live like Christ. He may be teaching that Christianity as a whole should be a cultural pattern that the society should adopt. He may be teaching what ought to be told to the government of the country, or to the nations of the world. These things Jesus Christ did not do. If we bid him God speed, we give our personal influence in support of that person, and are a partaker of him with his evil deeds. This admonition comes close to us because every day we have dealings with people of varying views. People do not like to be evaluated. They do not like to have their views appraised. If we start asking people what they believe, they resent it, because they think we should just accept them anyway. But this Second Epistle of John makes it very clear. You and I cannot accept them. We cannot take them unless they teach the truth as it is in Jesus of Nazareth, the living God in personal fellowship with His child here upon earth.

In the latter part of this Epistle is a personal word. John writes, "Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face that our joy may be full." This brings out another wonderful thought about the Christian life and experience. We need personal fellowship. We need to have contact with other Christian people, especially those who see the things of the Lord in the same way we do. John ends his letter by saying, "The children of thy elect sister greet thee." So in this epistle we have had a word spoken to us as Christians by this faithful servant.

III John 1-8

Second and Third John are alike in that each of them were written to one person rather than to a church. Second John was apparently written to a woman and her children. The Third Epistle was written to a man. It begins by saying, "The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth." Here again the focus is upon conduct. Both Second John and Third John have to do with our dealing with other believers. In Second John the writer was anxious to warn against an easy acceptance of anybody. It was almost as though he wanted us to be careful whom we endorsed. He warned us against an easy acceptance of unsound doctrine. He intimated that it made a difference as to what a person teaches. John was actually saying to the elect lady that she should not receive into her house persons who were teaching anything else than the simple truth that is in Jesus of Nazareth.

In Third John the attention is on another aspect of this relationship. Here we have encouragement to be helpful to others, especially to strangers. This epistle is just one chapter, fourteen verses long. "The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth." This is a letter of commendation and encouragement. John says to this man that he loves him dearly, "Whom I love in the truth." He uses this phrase, in the truth several times. I do not think he means talking in truth in the sense that a person is sincere and honest. This in the truth means the truth of the Gospel. The truth of the Gospel would refer to real Christian experience in Christ. Evidently Gaius was a real Christian and John could say, "Whom I love in the truth." I love him because he is such a genuine Christian. He is a man in whom the Holy Spirit is making the things of Jesus Christ active and strong.

John goes on to say, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." Apparently this man's soul was prospering and John was simply saying he wished he could be as fortunate in everything else as he was in spiritual things. In the third verse we get it a little clearer. "For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth." The prosperity of the soul . . . the wholesome, strong, healthy condition of a Christian soul, will follow obedience to the will of God. He goes on in the third verse to say that the soul was prospering because he walked in the truth. If his soul were prospering because he obeyed the will of God, John's wish was that his materials and personal prosperity might be added to that. "I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper in everything," in business, and in personal affairs and be in health physically in every way, "even as thy soul prospereth." There was no question about this man's spiritual prosperity. "For I rejoice greatly," writes John, "when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee even as thou walkest in truth." When the brethren came and testified to the truth that was in Gaius, they were not talking about the truth that he talked about. They were not talking about the understanding he had which showed up in an argument, or a debate, but as he lived. They came and testified of the truth he manifested in his living. "Even as thou walkest in the truth." This is brought out again in the fourth verse when John says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." They lived in the truth of the Gospel. They lived in personal relationship to God which is made available through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Then John starts with his message in verse five. "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers. Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles." These three verses would indicate the particular situation in which Gaius had been exercising himself. Apparently there were certain persons who were

traveling through the church, perhaps as evangelists, or missionaries. They were the brethren, even though they were strangers, and had come to this particular community. Apparently Gaius had helped them. Speaking of Gaius, John says, "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren and to strangers." Ordinarily we use the word *faithfully* to mean the way a man keeps a trust. We can depend that next week and some other time he will continue to do what he said he would do. Here we could look at the word *faithfully* as we look at the word *faith*. We act in a way that is full of faith. We are putting our faith to action, because of the way we treat the brethren and especially those who are strangers. "Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church."

Afterwards throughout the church people talked about what Gaius had done for them. They bore witness of his charity. As John is using the word charity, it is not referring to an inward attitude, a kindness or a mildness in the soul. It is actually what we have done for people. When these traveling Christians came through there, they told everybody that Gaius actually helped them. He gave them food and shelter and took care of them. "Whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: " John hurries on to tell Gaius that it was a good thing he had served the Lord when he had helped these people, "Because that for his name's sake they went forth taking nothing of the Gentiles." These were people who had gone out in the service of the Lord. They had done what they were doing in the name of the Lord, and were not depending upon unbelieving people to help them.

The eighth verse says, "We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth." We are reminded that there are people who are maintaining themselves as witnesses. They are going about witnessing to the Gospel, and they do not count on unbelieving people for support. Whenever we think of support we think of money. Probably money is involved, but I would like to suggest to you that support is in more than money. These people went out independent of popular support in money, yes. But they may well have gone out without popular support and approval. They may have been subject to criticism. Gaius would be one of the people who would support them. They may have gone out without the fellowship of people. There are persons who will not associate with certain Christians. In that sense, they do not support them. But Gaius was that kind of man. When it says "We, therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth," he is simply saying that it is an important thing for Christian people to give their personal help to others who are maintaining a testimony for Jesus Christ.

So we see that in this part of this letter John has spoken words of praise to a man who helped other Christians, even strangers when they came into the community. The help was given openly and the good word was spread abroad that this kind of fraternal help was good. Not only was this good because of the reputation of Gaius himself, but because the receivers were good people. It was supporting and encouraging people who were serving the Lord. If we give to people who are serving the Lord we actually share in their service.

III John 9-14

Second and Third John are messages from John to individuals about their personal relationship with other Christians. Second John is a warning to a certain woman and her family not to be free in giving hospitality and encouragement to those who do not teach the truth of Jesus Christ. In the Third Epistle of John we have a letter of commendation to a man by the name of Gaius encouraging and praising him for what he has done. Some traveling Christians came to this particular church. They were strangers, but Gaius received them. Because he felt they were real believers he took them in and shared with them, his own accommodations so that they could be taken care of. This act of kindness had been widely referred to.

In the latter part of the epistle from verse nine to the end, John is commenting further about this. He is especially talking about the attitude of certain individuals in the church. This brings to mind that as far as Christian experience is concerned the individual makes a difference. I count and my conduct counts in the sight of God. Two individuals are referred to in this short passage beginning with verse nine. One, John criticizes, and the other, John praises. "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not." There follows in the tenth verse a description of this man. Diotrephes was evidently an important man in the church. He was a man who had personal resentment against John. Why, we don't know. It is just intimated, however, that he was jealous of John. We read that Diotrephes loved to have preeminence among them. Maybe you have seen people like that. They are given some responsibility around the church and they fairly strut themselves in that position. In that position they act to favor certain persons and to hinder certain other people. In this case, when John had written to the church to encourage the church to receive certain traveling Christians, Diotrephes who loved to have the preeminence in the church and who possibly was jealous of John writing to them, had opposed it. Apparently, according to the ninth verse, he opposed this because he was against John. You have often seen that, too, when you are with a group of people. If one person does not like the other person he is often against everything the other person is for. If the other person makes a motion, this one will oppose it for no other reason than just that it was made by that person. Something like that is perhaps implied here. "Diotrephes who loveth to have the preeminence among them receiveth us not." He did not give John any status of leadership in the church. He was not willing to concede that John had anything to say that would be significant to the church that Diotrephes was in.

In the tenth verse John speaks more specifically about this man. "Wherefore, if I come," or you could say, when I come, "I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church." This is what Diotrephes did. He actually discredited John, and not being satisfied with being against John, he opposed the program that John had set up. He would not personally receive the brethren and he forbade anyone else to receive the brethren. He actually thrust them out of the church. So John is writing over against the influence of an individual person who was negative, who was against what was being proposed. Diotrephes apparently depreciated John. He spoke against him.

It is as if in a certain church John would suggest that we ought to help in missions in a particular place. Because some man does not like John, he not only will not do what John says, but he is against missions because John is for it. When he is against missions he will not even let the church support missions. You may not be aware of this because you may never have had anything to do with this kind of church. I have been a minister for a good many years and strange as it may seem, I happen to know there have been places and churches where if my name were mentioned as a possible speaker, there would be individuals there who would not want me. The interesting thing is this often happens when people have

never heard me speak. They do not know anything about me except to know what I stand for. They know I stand for believing what the Bible says to be truth. I believe it and I teach it. These just do not want this truth presented. This is what Diotrephes had been doing. By his conduct such a man as Diotrephes is no help to the church and he is no help to man. He is actually a real hindrance. He not only will not do it himself but he talks against the project so that no one else should do it.

In the eleventh verse John gives a general statement for us all to keep in mind when we think about somebody like that. "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." If a man's general attitude is so negative that he is opposed for no good reason, you can know he probably is opposed because he is personally negative about this thing. John set down this general rule, "Brethren, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." You might wonder, how will I know when a man is evil? "By their fruits ye shall know them." How will I know when a man is good? "By their fruits ye shall know them." This does not mean you can tell by the number of converts he has. It does not mean you can tell by the size of the church that he has, but it does mean you can tell by the way he talks whether or not he is talking in the way that is agreeable to the Lord Jesus Christ. "Follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God." This is a general statement for us to keep in mind. It lays the basis on which John has said that he is personally going to check up on Diotrephes when he comes.

By contrast, verse twelve says, "Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true." Demetrius is mentioned here in contrast to Diotrephes. John brings to our minds a great truth . . . that our Christian testimony experience is individual. It is a wonderful thing to belong to a big church. It is a wonderful thing to belong to a strong church, to belong to a missionary minded church, to belong to a liberal church. It may be true that in our congregation a great deal of money is raised because the people are liberal. A large proportion of it may be given to missions because the people are missionary minded. Probably they conduct themselves in such a way that they leave the impression of a faithful witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. This Third Epistle of John brings to our minds that if we join that church it will be a great comfort to us and a great help to us, but that is not enough. We need to individually stand for these things. We need to individually commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ and individually put our trust in Him. Demetrius is an example of this when John says, he has "good report of all men." If a person lives honestly, sincerely and faithfully, everyone will notice it and will speak well of a person like that.

So John closes his epistle by saying again, "I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name." Notice that individual personal touch. "Greet the friends by name." It is a wonderful thing to belong to a big church and a strong church, but are we big and are we strong? It is wonderful to belong to a Bible class that is really studying the Bible. Are we studying the Bible? Perhaps we belong to a church that makes a good deal of yielding to the Lord and seeking the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do we seek the face of the Lord Jesus Christ? Perhaps the church we are in promotes prayer meetings and is a notable church because of the amount that it prays. Do we pray? This would be the kind of thing that would come out in Third John. He has indicated this personal note when he closed the letter. "Greet thy friends by name," . . . one by one by one. We have been warned in the Second Epistle not to lightly or too eagerly accept anybody in the Lord. In the Third Epistle we have been encouraged to really help the brethren and do things for them. Stand by those who are telling the truth. Stand by those who are teaching the truth. Be seen with them and extend to them fellowship and comradeship and encouragement in every way we possibly can. This will be pleasing to the Lord.

Walking In The Lord

The name of John is connected with five New Testament books. The most familiar is the Gospel of John. It is easy to remember the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The last book in the New Testament is the Revelation, actually called the Revelation of Jesus Christ to John. We can say the Revelation of John, or to John. Just before the book of Revelation is the short book of Jude and before the book of Jude are three short epistles called the Epistles of John. We call them First John, Second John and Third John.

In the First Epistle of John the writer is stressing what it means to really live as a true believer in Jesus Christ. He points out that this requires conscious response to a certain relationship with God, which is offered in Jesus Christ. This relationship involves understanding God as Father and Jesus Christ as Son. The Father-Son relationship is not something we enter into but something that was begun. The Lord Jesus Christ did not become the Son of God. He was the Son of God. When He was born, He was begotten of the Father. This relationship is entered into by a believer in Jesus Christ. The man who receives Jesus Christ as his Saviour enters into relationship with God wherein he looks up to God as his Father. He understands that he was begotten of God in the new birth and that God is now his Father, not someone who will be his Father but actually is his Father. This relationship exists not because the believer is doing the things that are pleasing to God but because the believer has in him a life which has come from God through Jesus Christ. The very name, Jesus of Nazareth, is to stand in our hearts and minds as one that will bring to our attention this truth . . . God coming into the human heart. When we speak of Christ we are speaking of the Chosen One, the Anointed One. God planned all through Old Testament times that He would one day reveal His salvation through Jesus of Nazareth. The great truth is that God Himself has come to live in His people. The Book of First John emphasizes, "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." It is just as simple and as plain as that.

The personal problem of receiving the Gospel of Jesus Christ is confused by people who talk about these things but do not walk in the way of Jesus Christ. John calls them deceivers. They mislead us. John emphasizes the fact that "by their fruits ye shall know them." Where there is no walk, then talk is empty.

We cannot see inside a man. If the great truth that God is in us, doing His will, actually is operative in us, we will feel an inward willingness and eagerness to obey God. It will outwardly show in the fact that we will help other people. We will serve other people. The Lord Jesus Christ came for other people and if you and I have the same spirit in us we will do for other people. How I act toward my brother can be seen and this serves as a witness of the truth in Jesus Christ. The outward response to the truth in Christ strengthens my assurance of my own relation to Him. Even though at times I may wonder whether I really belong to the Lord, I can be encouraged to know I really belong to Him if I admit in my own conscience that I want to do His will. The outward evidence of my belonging is that I act in a way that will help other people and do it because I am inwardly led to do it. All this then will contribute to me in such a way that I can have fellowship with Him and with other people who walk with Him. This will result in my joy.

Now our attention is drawn to the next two short letters – Second John and Third John. Second John is just thirteen verses long and Third John is just fourteen verses long. These deal with practical obedience to God, with some definition of what that means. This matter of loving the brethren is brought up in Second and Third John. Both books were written to individual Christians. First John might be considered as being written to all the members of the church, that is to anybody. "These things have I written unto you that believe." Second John was written to a woman called "the elect lady." Third John was written to a man called "the well-beloved Gaius." Each letter deals with personal action in obeying God in the

matter of loving the brethren; yet they emphasize opposite aspects. What is in Second John is different from what is in Third John, but they do not contradict each other.

Second John warns us that in our good will toward other people we should not endorse those who are not walking in the truth. We should discriminate among the people that we are going to approve. It is a serious warning that we should be very careful not to encourage error. If I know that a man is going wrong I ought not to treat him as if he were going right. If he is going wrong I should tell him he is going wrong. If I do not then I am actually partly responsible for the disaster that will occur to him as he goes on the wrong road to its end.

On the other hand, Third John gives praise to Gaius for sharing with others who serve the Lord Jesus, even though they were strangers to him. Here are different aspects of dealing with other people. Second John gives the serious grey warning that in our good will toward other people we don't fall into the mistake of encouraging wrong ideas. Third John praises us and encourages us in every way to be fellow helpers of those who serve the Lord, even though those persons are strangers to us.

There are various theories as to who "the elect lady" is and what it means. If we accept this just the way it reads "the elect lady" is an estimable woman in the church, probably with her family. She is warned not to fraternize with people who are not walking in the truth. A good many of us may wonder about this warning. John makes it as plain as it can be: we ought not to fraternize. To act as a brother toward a man who is actually going in the wrong direction is to give the wrong impression. Second John seems necessary because of the presence of some in the church who claim to advance beyond the Gospel and actually present ideas that are contrary to it. This is a very interesting line of thought. Back in the time of John there were people who claimed that they went beyond the simple Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They actually claimed to progress. Verse nine says, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ . . ." The implication of the word transgress is to transgress in going forward. People were presenting ideas they felt were more than the simple Gospel, but in so doing they were actually presenting a different gospel than the one which they had. Such persons appear in the company of Christians and seem to ask for acceptance and hospitality. Who are these people? John spoke of them as those "who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh."

Jesus understood Himself to be the Son of God. He had that personal relationship, where He looked up into the heavens and said, Our Father. He heard from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Lord Jesus was never self-centered. He was never self-interested. He was never self-seeking. He was always obedient to His Father. He was always yielded to His Father. He was always led by His Father.

When we see a person who claims to be a Christian we ask ourselves, Is he interested in himself? Is he seeking to advance his own position? If so, he is not following the Lord Jesus Christ. This life of Jesus in our hearts is never our own doing. It is not that I do these things because I am now good, or I know how to be good, or I am now going to be wise. It is always Jesus Christ Himself working in me, activated in me by the Holy Spirit. This is how the life of Jesus actually operates in me. It begins in the new birth. There must be a second birth. I must be born spiritually, even as I was born once physically. I was born physically from my parents. I grew up sociologically in my community. I developed my personality psychologically among people around me. All of this taken together is called the flesh. But if I am going to have the life of the Lord Jesus in me I must be born again and have a new nature. Everyone that is in Christ Jesus is a new creature . . . not new with reference to the flesh, not new with reference to my family, but new with reference to God. The new life grows in personal communion with the living Lord. The Christian person is not encouraged to grow by memorizing and keeping rules. No, the person who wants to grow as a Christian looks into the face of the living Lord Jesus Christ. We read the New Testament to find out about Him, and as we read the New Testament prayerfully, we face the Lord, and we have personal dealings with the Lord.

This new life manifests itself in certain things that we will recognize because they are in Jesus. For instance, there is prayerful communion with the Father and fellowship with others. If I have the life of the Lord Jesus in me, it is possible for me at any time to talk to my Father in heaven. I will join other people in talking to my Father. There will be prayerfulness in me if I have the life of the Lord Jesus in me. My attitude toward the Old Testament Scriptures will be that they are the word of God. The Lord Jesus quoted the Scriptures and said "As it is written." He never doubted that each one of them had full authority just as He quoted it. I will be far more interested in doing the will of God than getting anywhere in this world. There will be no involvement as far as this world is concerned. If I am motivated from within by the life that is in the Lord Jesus Christ, I will be conscious of the fact that, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." So the Christian does not fight in this world about Christian things. In this world we will do what is right, and what is fair, what is honest and what is just. We will render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's. We will be looking for the end of this world. We do not expect to improve the world. Jesus expected the world to be destroyed, and if the mind of the Lord Jesus is in me that will be my outlook. Jesus was interested in foreign missions, and I will be interested in foreign missions if I have the life of the Lord Jesus in my heart. I will have no interest in personal prestige, or personal position. I will not be anxious to be at the head of anything, or scheme to get some kind of special honor.

God permits this Gospel to be challenged by some who claim to have gotten their start this way but now have progressed beyond it. They teach that the believer should do certain things because he is a believer. Because he is a Christian he should do certain things in his own wisdom. He should do certain things in his own strength. When there are people who say they are going to go beyond the Gospel, John in his Second Epistle would say, Do not favor that person. Do not let that person think that you are encouraging him to go along in the way he is doing. If we have the life that is in the Lord Jesus Christ and for any reason at all have trouble and concern; we will turn to God. We will find our peace in God. We have a personal fellowship with God. There are people who will start out that way and then will tell us that they can develop this peace by psychological understanding or manipulation. They might say, if we were to go to a psychiatrist and have him help us, we would find this peace. If we watch them closely, we will find such people no longer pray. Such people no longer have personal dealings with the Lord. John warns us, do not endorse that kind of thing, do not endorse anything that takes you away from the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Third John gives us an encouragement in the matter of favoring anybody who walks in the way of the Lord. Third John is necessary because the body of Christ has now become so numerous and so varied that we must be ready to accept and to share with persons who we would really have to count as strangers. The lack of personal acquaintances in a social way should not hinder our ready willingness to have fellowship with strangers who are truly the Lord Jesus Christ's. There will be people outside our own congregation but they are real Christians and we should recognize them. There are those outside our own class of society who are real Christians and we should think kindly and share with them. In this way we will support and encourage evangelistic projects that are not our own. There will be evangelism going on in the community which honors the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and is not in our church, but we are for it. There is a Bible study going on in the community. It did not start in our church, but it honors the Lord and we are in favor of it. There are missions going on that our church is not promoting, but we will favor those things. If the missionaries witness to the Lord Jesus Christ and according to the Scriptures they are walking in the way of God, we are in favor of them, even if they are not ours. If they move along in what they are doing through the Holy Spirit, we are in favor of them, even though they are not ours.

In Third John we find people in the church like Diotrophes who loved to have the preeminence. There are people who because of their own political position in the church will ignore what others are doing. They will oppose what others are doing even when they themselves are doing nothing. They hear

about a work being done among young people in college. It did not start from their church so they will not have anything to do with it. They may not be doing anything about the young people in college and these other people are, but they do not want to have anything to do with it. Why? Because they are not in charge of it. Third John warns us against that kind of thing. John urges us to support any who are true to Jesus Christ and refuse to endorse any who claim to go beyond the Gospel. In all these ways we are helped to understand that in loving the brethren we should exercise discrimination and carefulness.