

The Last Eyewitness, XII

Second Helping (2ND John)

January 4, 2004

THE CHOSEN LADY

- We'll be covering the entire book of 2nd John.
- The good news is it's only thirteen verses long.

In John's day traveling teachers and preachers expected to be given a place to stay wherever they were speaking.

- Inn's were expensive, dangerous, and disreputable.
- Most public lodgings also doubled as brothels.

Let's look at John's greeting:

The elder, to the chosen lady and her children ... - 2 John 1 NIV

This isn't just a formal way of speaking (instead of from John, to Lydia) many theologians believe we're looking at *code names*. Persecution was a constant threat; so John may be carefully hiding their identities from enemies of the faith.

Q: So, who was this chosen lady?

Some believe that it's a poetic way of referring to the church; but that symbolism breaks down as the letter continues.

Most likely, it was an actual woman who opened her home to traveling preachers (John mentions this in a few verses).

- There's a good chance John has enjoyed her hospitality.

Now, he gets word that she's housing some of the heretics who are working against the gospel (Docetists & Ebionites).

- John assumes it's simply a case of ignorance and eagerness to do good.

So, he sends a brief letter to encourage this woman's faith, and to warn her to be on the lookout for deceivers and antichrists.

TRUTH and LOVE

The elder, To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth – and not I only, but also all who know the truth – because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love. [*This is going to be John’s theme*] It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. – 2 John 1-4 NIV

Let’s not confuse walking in the truth with academic brilliance or scholastic aptitude. You could have no idea what those words mean and still walk in the truth just fine.

Because the test for truth in our lives; the exam that tells us if we’re genuinely walking in “the truth” is:

1. Our love and compassion for others
2. Our love and enthusiasm for Christ

To John, truth and love are two sides to the same coin.

And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. – 2 John 5-6 NIV

Look at what we’ve read so far. John repeats the word truth five times. Not so coincidentally, he repeats the word love five times.

- Truth must be balanced with love.
- Love must be balanced with truth.

We have a tendency to emphasize one over the other.

Q: Have you known someone who is quick to quote the “truth” but without seasoning it with kindness and grace and mercy?

An exclusive emphasis on doctrine and behavior quickly develops into a harsh, impatient, and insensitive attitude toward others.

Q: Have you known someone who is quick to show acceptance and forgiveness without good discernment or “tough love”?

This kind of enabling compassion will ignore or neglect the facts for the sake of peace and unity and harmony.

Q: Which do you tend to over emphasize?

We all naturally lean to one side or the other. So John grabs our attention with the *Three R's of Learning*: Repetition, Repetition, Repetition.

- Let's read those highlighted words together: love, truth, truth, truth, truth, love, truth, love, love, love.

One of the ways God measures our spiritual maturity is by the balance of truth and love in our relationships. At judgment He won't say, "Bring me your trophies, your awards, and your bank account." He's going to say, "Let's look at how you treated others. Where you loving? Where you truthful?"

- We can speak truth without love.
- We can show love without being honest.

But when it's our time to go before the Lord ...

- All we can take with us is our character

DECEIVERS and ANTICHRISTS

Now John warns this woman to take notice of those who would abuse her hospitality, take advantage of her generosity, and possibly mislead her and her children from the truth.

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.
- 2 John 7 NIV

We know who John is talking about because he talked extensively about them in his first letter.

1. The Ebionites who denied the *deity* of Christ
2. The Docetists who denied the *humanity* of Christ

Q: Do you think times change much? This stuff is so relevant!

A Time Magazine article from December 22 (2003) talks about the "new" diversities in Christianity that are gaining in popularity in America.

The four main groups they cover include the Ebionites and the Gnostics (which is a later term for the Docetists).

Let me read you a couple of quotes:

[Marcus Borg, author of *The Heart of Christianity* says] There's a lot of interest in early Christian diversity because many people who have left the church – and some who are still in it – are looking for another way of being Christian. – *Time*, Dec. 22, 2003; pg 56

[Princeton professor, Elaine] Pagels has identified a bouquet of elements attractive to the modern spiritual seeker ... She claims to have found a Christianity less keyed to make-or-break beliefs like the virgin birth or even Christ's divinity ... – *Time*, Dec. 22, 2003; pg 57

Q: Are you looking for another way of being Christian?

- It's easier to change our beliefs than our behavior.

We have a simple choice to make:

- Mold *Him* into the image we desire.
- Allow Him to mold us into His image.

It's tempting; it's appealing; it's subtle. John says:

Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. – 2 John 8-11 NIV

It's interesting that the two major religions of our day that compromise the fullness of Christ (e.g. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses) both specialize in coming to our houses.

- John isn't telling us to slam the door on those in error.

If we can, we *should* engage in loving and gracious interaction to help others understand our views on the fullness of Christ.

John's warning is: Don't make room for those who are *capable* of distracting or misleading you from truth and love.

I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. The children of your chosen sister send their greetings. – 2 John 12-13 NIV

Q: Do you know why 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John are in this order?

A: Length; longest to shortest. We don't know the chronology.

But, it's possible that the Lord made sure John couldn't make that trip; and his much to write to you became our New Testament letter of 1st John.