

Christ Community Covenant Church
The letters of John: Walking upright in an inclined world
Pastor Dave Scherrer - February 9, 2014

Do you remember the man who walked with God?

Genesis 5:21-24 "When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away."

I've always envied Enoch, not because God took him so that he wouldn't experience death, but because of his close walk with God. CAN YOU IMAGINE THAT WALK? Can you imagine the communion, the fellowship, the talks he had with God? No, it's difficult because none of us have experienced anything like what he had. Or so it seems. Deuteronomy 10:12-13 states; "And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, **to walk in all his ways**, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?"

In these little letters we are studying we see that John's message is clear about the life we should live, the life we should walk.

- 1- We must walk in truth, believing in God and taking Him at His word
- 2- We must walk in His love, sharing His love
- 3- We must walk in obedience on that love and truth

Last week I floated three words and I still hold to them: Light and Life and Love. But this week we are turning our attention to three new words, they too are the regular themes of these little letters. Believe, Love, Obey.

Instead of starting with 1 John we are going to go at this a bit backwards perhaps. 2 and 3 John vs 1 John all have the same themes but the 2 and 3 letters are to specific people and the letter of 1 John was more of a sermon that went throughout the churches, all dealing with these same themes of believe and love and obey. Let's go ahead and turn to our passage.

2 John

¹ 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, ² because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever: ³ Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

⁴ I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children **walking in the truth**, just as we were commanded by the Father. ⁵ 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**.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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. ⁸ Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, ¹¹ for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

John the Apostle and 'the Elder' to the chosen 'lady'

These are the shortest epistles in the New Testament. Both have less than 300 Greek words. This one has about 200, I think; 245 Greek words, very brief letter. Each of these two letters could fit as they do on your paper on one single papyrus sheet, and in both letters John says I have more to say but I'm not

going to write it. The apostle John is not mentioned in either of these letters, but he is widely held--and has always been held--to be the author by long-standing, universal tradition. They were then likely to have been written the same time or soon after 1 John, which was at the end of his life. He was the last living apostle. All the rest were dead and it was about 90 to 95 A.D., at the end of that first century while he was in ministry at Ephesus, that he wrote all three of these, and also received the Revelation just after that, probably in the year 96.

Very brief letters; both of them written to an individual--one to a lady, one to a man. They are classic in the sense that they are in the correspondent style of the Roman Empire. They're classic examples of personal correspondence in the way that they're laid out. Almost always there is a nice salutation and we find that in verse 3 where he blesses the reader with the character of God:

***Grace, Mercy and Peace from God the Father
Truth and Love from Jesus Christ***

Isn't this a great salutation? Is there any more that you could wish for someone you love?
So this leads us to our three words.

Believe the Truth, Love God, Obey

Believe. And of course that means to believe in the Truth. The object of our faith means everything. The God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob, Jesus Christ His Son and the Holy Spirit are the one true God. There is a tendency to say, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe with all your heart." That is a nice sounding platitude that doesn't work in the work a day world much less in spiritual matters. If your car battery is dead and you sincerely believe that it is not dead and you go out to start your car on a subzero morning, you will find the battery to be dead, regardless of your sincerity. The object of our faith means everything not our passion for the object. Some objects are true and others are not. To put your faith in a lesser false god is a loser's game. The truth and then believing in the truth are regular themes of the Christian faith.

John was laser focused on this idea of believing in the truth because Jesus was focused on us believing in Him as the Truth. John records the words of Jesus in chapter 6 of his gospel:

²⁸Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"²⁹Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."³⁵Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.³⁶Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.⁴⁷Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

Five times in those four verses you have a Greek word *aletheia*, meaning "truth." Clearly, then, John is writing in the realm of the truth. He lives in the truth. In every sense he is informed and controlled and motivated by the truth. John has written this brief letter to call us to that same truth in a world of lies and liars. I have long said that we live in a world of lies presided over by the arch-liar, Satan, who is the father of lies. More on that in a bit

But the reason for writing and calling people to live in the truth is because of the ever-present threat of false teachers. 1 John basically was directed at this same problem of false teachers, in chapter 2 verse 22, ***"Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ."*** Verse 23 - ***"Whoever denies the Son doesn't have the Father."*** And again over in chapter 4 he says ***try the spirits; don't believe everybody. See if they're from God. "Many false prophets have gone out into the world."*** At the heart of the whole writing of these little letters was the issue that false teachers were present and they were giving a false standard of salvation and how we are supposed to respond as a body of believers.

Now the role of the church is clearly defined in the Bible. One verse sums it up, 1 Timothy 3:15, "The church exists in the world to be the pillar and ground of the truth." And if the church ever abandons the truth then it ceases to be the church of Jesus Christ.

We exist to represent the truth. That is our mission, and that is our purpose. And failing to uphold and live the truth, we cease to be the church, as Israel failed to uphold and live the truth and cease to be the witness nation. If there's anything that should ever occur in a church, it should be the centrality of the truth, the revealed truth of God's Word.

But that is not our only stewardship. We are also to love. Our mission statement says it clearly and simply we are to love God and love others. Love each other in the church and to love those who do not yet believe and love God.

Loving God is a curious task. We love Him for who he is and also for what he has done. There is a traditional hymn that we sang just last week and it perhaps says it best:

*I love Thee because Thou has first loved me, And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree.
I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow; If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

We love God and that motivates us to spend time with Him and we long to be with Him and to look for ways to serve Him. Worship is an act of truth and love, we see who he is in truth and we fall at his feet, which is what the word worship means and from there we sing because singing is the human way of connecting the head to the heart. Truth and Love.

But it is not just truth and love, the equation must finally also equate to obedience. John is known as the *love disciple* but I think it might be just as well as to refer to him as the *obedience disciple*. In his gospel John records Jesus' words:

John 14:15

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments"

And in the letters of John he continues the idea:

1 John 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me.

1 John 2:3 And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

1 John 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

2 John 6 And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.

When (my daughter) Kristin was small she was in her room and she had overturned a box of stuffed animals and I walked in there and said, "Kristin, I want you to pick up every last one of these animals before you do anything else." She fussed a little bit and then I walked out and started doing something else. About 10 minutes later, she comes to me dressed up like Cinderella holding a picture that she had just colored and she said, "Daddy, you like it?" I said, "It's pretty, but how does that room look?" No comment. So I asked again, "Is your room picked up like I asked?" Her response... "I don't know." Then she goes, "Don't you like my picture?" I said, "I do, but do you know what I would really like? Do you know what would really make Daddy happy? If you did what I had asked you to do."

And you know the one thing God wants from us above anything else...to do what He says. 1 Samuel 15:22 says, "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice." Eugene Peterson has written a book entitled, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. And I think that explains our church. We've had a wonderful past, but this is not the time for our church to rest on its laurels, it's not a time to coast. It's a time to make certain that we deepen in our faith and our relationship with Christ.

You see God has given us the choice...the choice to obey or to disobey. And the choice is yours. *As C. S. Lewis stated: 'There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'* So whose will is going to be done in your life?

The choice to obey is not always an easy one. Sometimes the urge to do wrong will be oh so strong that all we want to do is to give in. I want to get back to the reason it is so difficult for us to obey and that is that we live in a world of lies.

Living in a world of lies

And the bad thing is these lies are not benign little white lies but lies that kill and maim and destroy.

Ephesians 2:2

² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—

John 8:44

⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

2 Timothy 3:13

¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it

We are going to spend more time in the upcoming weeks looking at this idea of lies and false teachers but I wanted to end today on a practical note.

Stop this, do that!

***Stop living lives 'against' things
Do live for Christ and His priorities in the world***

III: The Church Lady

James 3:17

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Prayer