

## **Dr. Robert Yarbrough, The Johannine Epistles, Session 4, 2 John, Notes to a Trusted Church**

Welcome to our continuing series of lectures on John's letters. I'm calling this series the Johannine Epistles, Balancing the Christian Life.

And in our last lecture, we talked about a letter to someone named Gaius, and I called that lecture Third John, Notes to a Trusted Friend.

And Second John has a very similar format, very similar language, but I'm going to call it Notes to a Trusted Church. I want to once more mention the method of interpretation I'm using, because how we read often affects what we see. And then I won't mention this anymore in these lectures, but I want to go over it twice in case someone didn't see it the first time.

It's a very two-step, a very simple two-step process. Process number one, "see," and number two, "say." But make sure you see before you say.

And by see, I mean observing what is there. And actually, that's a lifelong process for any biblical book or passage or substantial verse, because it happened in another place and time. It happened in a language probably not our own.

And the more you study these things, and I've been studying them for 45 years or more, the more you learn, you're not aware of everything. You don't know everything. And sometimes I wonder why I keep learning, because the more I learn, the less I am sure of many things.

Of course, I am more sure about, I hope, the basic things, the essential things. But we need to see what was, see what was then and there, before we start saying what it means. It's really easy to grab a Bible verse.

We see politicians do this all the time. They'll quote a Bible verse, and they'll relate it to something that's going on in our day and time. And if you know the Bible verse in its setting, it has nothing to do with what they're applying it to.

So that's a case of saying without seeing. So, we want to see, and I'm going to be reading the text as we go, so we'll at least have a chance to see what's there, and it will be yellow on the screen. And then after we see, then we'll make judgments, we'll state conclusions that I hope are faithful to them then and there, but that apply to the here and now.

So, we want to bring what's there into the here and now, but we want to do it, making sure that we're at least approximating what was there and then. And you'll

see that below, as we proceed, I'll have the text in yellow, and then I'll have my saying part in boxes to separate it off from God's holy word. My saying is not the same as God's word.

God's word is God's word. If my interpretation is faithful, then it will open up God's word, but the thing that we're primarily attuned to is the word of God and not my sayings about it. So, 2 John consists of a greeting, and you can summarize it with the words, John's love, that is love for his readers, in truth, secondly, his joy, but also concern, thirdly, a warning for this congregation, and then he's got a farewell.

So first, John's love in truth, verses 1 through 3. The elder, and that's John, to the elect lady and her children, and as you study 2 John, you see that first he addresses them in the singular as a group, but then this lady has children, which if you just start in reading, you think, well, this is a woman and her kids, but as you go further in, you see it's a congregation, and so the group as a whole is called an elect lady, and then the members of the congregation are called the children. So, the elder to, we could say, to a church and its members, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us, you could translate that also, among 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.

So, some observations. Number one, my name, in similarity with the language of 1st and 3rd John, John the son of Zebedee is the author, and I mentioned in the last lecture, in 1st Peter 5.1, Peter calls himself an elder, he calls himself a fellow elder, along with those church leaders that are reading the epistle of 1st Peter. Then John says, not only I, but also all who know the truth.

And John voices the same sense of ecclesial solidarity as Paul. There's a oneness to the people of God who know the Lord Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of their sins. I hope you know this yourself, you may be living in an area where there are a lot of different kinds of people, but people who know Christ have a commonality that transcends their personal differences, or their tribal differences, or their social differences, or their economic differences, or their educational differences.

There are a lot of ways that people distinguish themselves from others, often to elevate themselves above others, or to make it clear who the enemy is. You're not one of us, you're one of them. But the gospel brings people into a solidarity, and you'll remember that the Greek word for church is ecclesia, so we have this word in English, ecclesial, having to do with the church.

So, we see in these first three verses an ecclesial solidarity, not only John, but all who know the truth, which could refer to the gospel message, but it also must refer to the one that is represented by the gospel message, so it's Christ and the truth about Christ and God. Now, it's possible, and I raise the question in my seeing, and I raise it

as a question because I can't be sure, but was John addressing 2 John to the Ephesian congregation? Because that was the prominent congregation of the seven churches of Asia, and if John is, as I'm theorizing, he's writing 2 John to the church as a cover letter for the book of 1 John, which because of problems in the churches, 1 John is a letter to all the churches where there is the problem, that there has been schism and there are spirits that they need to test because there are people preaching Christ in a false way in the congregations. So, if this was at Ephesus, then we have to think back to what Paul wrote to that church at Ephesus, which almost certainly would be on file there in the church's archives, and Paul wrote about the ecclesial solidarity that the church enjoys.

Paul said, I, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit, so this could be the unity that the spirit produces, it could be the unity that the spirit possesses as a part of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and a unified spirit of God is going to bring unity into those who are united with God by the gospel message, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of shalom, the bond of peace. Remember at the end of 3 John, he wishes peace to them. There is one body and one spirit, and now this is the solidarity of the ecclesia, the church.

There's one body and one spirit, and note, he's writing to an Ephesian congregation in which there would be many house churches, and he's writing to churches in Asia, in which there were seven different Asian churches in that province, so locally there was not just one body, there were numerous bodies, but they're all united, there's ecclesial solidarity, there's one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, the translators say that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. One of the major takeaways from these opening verses is that there is a strong sense of ecclesial solidarity in this little letter called 2 John.

He concludes his greeting by saying grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, not may it be with us, but it's like a future prediction, and I'm calling this pastoral optimism. I think he's writing to this church, and he warns them about things that may be going on, but if this is a cover letter for 1 John, the 1 John letter warns about even bigger things and more pressing things that are going on. If you're about to move into troubled territory, you've got to have hope that you're going to survive this.

This is not starry-eyed optimism, blind faith against all reason, but this is somebody who's walked with the Lord and has seen God's provision through trying circumstances. Earlier in these lectures, I mentioned John's trauma, all the death, all the suffering, the blood that John has seen. As long as we have life on this earth and breath on this earth, God has us here to abide in him for another day, and if that

means struggle onward and contend for the faith, that can be part of our mission and calling.

So John grounds an optimism from the Father and from the Father's Son in truth and love. Notice, grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from, not from John, but from God and the Son of God, whom he is a servant of and a messenger of, so that sums up the greeting.

We come then to joy and concern. I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children, not all of them, but some of them, walking in the truth, just as you 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, so here's his concern, 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. So, first of all, note the interplay here.

I'm going to split my screen so I can keep those Bible verses there. Note the interplay in that paragraph between truth, commandments, and love. And this is getting closer to balancing the Christian life, and I'll talk about that more in the next lecture.

But truth has to do with what we know, or what we think, or what we're taught. That's the truth. Now, it refers to Christ, and Christ is called the truth, but truth is not just a person that can't be defined.

There are many things that we do know and accept or not about Christ that define what we can call a body of truth. So that's in our minds. We learn.

We hear with our ears. We process it with our minds. But then there are commandments, and commandments are things that we do.

Commandments are ethics. They're the way we live. They're the way we behave.

And then love. And love is a disposition of the heart. We love or we don't love.

We're apathetic. We're warm. We're cold.

We're lukewarm. These are all indicators of what we can call interpersonal devotion. I like the word rapport.

We have a rapport with people. And if you go through this paragraph, and if you underline all the words that have to do with truth, and all the words that have to do with commands, and all the words that have to do with love, then you're going to find that these people are pretty largely defined by those three words as they relate to God, Father and Son, and to each other. So, I just want to make that observation.

As I say, I'll talk more about it in the next lecture. Secondly, a lot of people have observed 1, 2, and 3 John make no reference to the And that's not really true, of course, because we have Cain mentioned in the Old Testament. But I want to encourage you to think of the Old Testament reverb, reverberations, echoes.

John, in his teaching here, is teaching about God and about Christ, so we can call it theological teaching. He is not introducing a new philosophy of religion. So you had some Old Testament religion, and now this is the real religion, the Jesus religion.

That's not the way it is. This letter, like 1 John, reconceives Old Testament godliness in the wake of Christ's fulfillment of the Scriptures. And that was always true.

Old Testament godliness was a godliness of promise. Abraham received a promise. Adam and Eve received a promise.

Noah received a promise. And they all looked ahead to what God would do to fulfill His promise. But in that faith, they came into a faith relationship with the God who had come to them and said, I've got a deal for you.

We call it a covenant. And people who believed in God's promise became friends of God. They became followers of God.

They were saved by the promise that was fulfilled in Christ. And that's how John is incorporating into all of his language the promise of the God who said, I will send a Deliverer. I will send a Messiah.

And now in the wake of Jesus' coming and Jesus' ascending to the Father, we know God the Father who sent His Son. And He sent His Spirit. Now that His Son is at the right hand of God in our sinning, we have what John calls the paraclete in John 13 through 17.

So there is a very strong, very strong presence of the Old Testament God who gave commandments and who offered a relationship to a people as they walked in His commandments. And as they had love for one another. Because we know the great love commands are both in the Old Testament.

Love the Lord your God, love your neighbor as yourself. The third observation is a concern. Notice he says, some of your children are walking in the truth.

That's in verse 4. But many deceivers have gone out. That's kind of scary. And these deceivers feature, they stand for, they're characterized by a defective representation of Jesus Christ.

Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. And I think what he means by that is, and I want to especially point out that that word Christ, if it is a proper name, it's not just a name. It's a word that refers to His mission and His status as the fulfiller of His mission.

He is the Messiah. He is the anointed one. He is the one sent from God to inaugurate God's rule over a world that God is redeeming.

And of course, God's always been the ruler of it, but He has promised to come somehow. Now we know He came in His Son, and He represented God to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And He died to atone for sins, and He rose from the dead and conquered death and has returned to the Father from whence He will return to judge the living and the dead.

And then this world will be put to right at the Lord's return; however, the eschatology, however the timetable works out on that. We'll see when it happens. But these deceivers don't confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh.

And that could mean a lot of things, but it negates His mission in its fullness. Whatever aspect of it, are they denying the Incarnation? Are they denying that He worked miracles? Are they denying that He ascended to the Father? Are they denying that His blood on the cross atoned for sin? I mean, there are lots of ways of denying Jesus in terms of what He did when He came in the flesh. But I think it's intentionally vague because that makes us think in broad terms.

And it alerts us that there are a lot of ways to reject Jesus. And you may love to use His name, and you may love the feeling of being around people who like to talk about Jesus. But just because you talk about Jesus, that doesn't mean that that Jesus, in the fullness of His messianic mission and the integrity of His oneness with God and the truth of what He said and what He taught, it doesn't mean that that Jesus is signing onto your agenda as you use His name.

And people do use the name of Jesus all over the place, and a lot of it's good and a lot of it's suspect. And we're talking about the suspect's use of Jesus' name. Anybody who does this, he says, end of verse 7, the translation here is the deceiver.

This is a word that's cognate with our word planet. And it has to do with wandering, unstable. You look up one minute, and there's Venus.

You look up a little while later, and there's Venus. It's all over the sky. And the stars are stable on a given night.

You stare at the stars all night. They're not moving across the sky. Satellites move across the sky.

Planes move across the sky. Planets move, but not the stars. And there are people who, with reference to Christ, they're wandering.

They're here. They're there. They're all over the place.

And it can also refer to somebody who causes others to stray. They make disciples, but they're making disciples for themselves or for their movement. They're not making disciples of Christ.

There's a stability to Christ. There's an instability to misrepresentations of Christ. And in part because any deceiver is working in connection with this person that John calls the antichrist, which could mean Christ's substitute, or it could mean an opponent of Christ.

And I think it means both. So, there are humans, and let's just say they're well-meaning. But if they're misrepresenting Christ, whether they know it or not, they're doing the bidding of somebody that they may not even believe in the existence of, and we often call him the devil or Satan.

And that is the antichrist or the spirit of the antichrist. And John has this concern that there is this malign influence in this church that he has good things to say to and good things to say about. But you can see when he says, some of your children, that's not as good news as it could be.

And then when he says many deceivers, well, that's a little scarier yet. And so, the end of his joy yet concern paragraph is watch yourselves so that you may not lose what we have worked for. So, he envisions himself as an apostolic and pastoral leader.

Whatever else Christians do, they work. This is the human lot. God placed Adam and Eve in the garden to tend the garden.

This was before they sinned. The Ten Commandments say, six days you shall work. This is God's earth.

We are agents of the care of God's earth. And so, it's a glorious thing to labor. Now, because of sin, people resent whatever it is that God made them to do.

So, a lot of times, people hate work. But the Hebrew, the Jewish, the Christian ethos, it values work. We glorify God by our daily labor.

A large measure because it's our glory to love God and love others. And we love others by caring for them. And caring for others is work.

If you're a mother, how do you care for your children? I mean, you do things so that they can eat and they can be clean and they can play and they can be protected. And parents who are good parents, they're worn out all the time because they're serving their children. And children with good parents, especially if there are many children in the family, they learn to do chores.

I mean, children need to play, but children also need to learn to serve their brothers and sisters and learn to help their parents and learn to obey what they're told to do. You know, shape their character so that their lives will more and more be aware of what others need. And how I can be of benefit to others.

Well, John, this is an Old Testament connection. He's connected with the Old Testament heritage of glorifying God by laboring for God. Paul said we are co-laborers together with God.

And John says we've worked for something. If John is the pastor of the churches of Asia, he's been there maybe 10, 20, or 25 years. And there's a legacy of labor there.

And, you know, churches emerged from this pagan region where there was a synagogue of Satan. Was that at Sardis? I forget exactly which church that was. But, you know, there were a lot of nefarious influences.

There was a Jezebel in one church. There were a lot of things they had to overcome. And then the pagan culture was not friendly to Christianity.

And the Roman imperial cult was not friendly to Christianity. And the cult to Artemis of the Ephesians. Remember in Acts 19 when the church is planted, they had riots because the early Christians were causing people not to buy so many idols.

And so the silversmiths' union revolted, and they caused riots, you know, out of antagonism toward the Christians. And, you know, their desire for their livelihood. So, if there is a Christian presence and there was, it's because there was a lot of sacrifice, a lot of work, a lot of effort.



And John says, we don't want to lose the momentum. We don't want to lose the reward that we've worked for. Watch yourselves so that you may win a full reward.

You know, there's nothing wrong with realizing I'm working. I'm tired. I don't understand why what just happened to me happened to me.

Recently, I was at a seminary graduation. I was very tired from grading papers all week and getting lectures ready. And, you know, I'm a called and ordained minister and professor.

So I'm working for the Lord. And I get a text during graduation and it says, and I knew there was a storm because we'd had a tornado warning. We'd gone to the basement of the building where we had the graduation.

But we went upstairs and we were having a graduation with hundreds of people. And I get this message: a tree has fallen on our house. And it was from my wife.

So, I went home. I left the graduation. I hope my president forgives me.

And I found out it was much worse than I thought. And lots of people that day found out how much worse it was than they thought. As a large storm hit a large city, five people died.

Hundreds of people lost their homes. Thousands of people lost homes, jobs, and their whole lives. So why did that happen? There are lots of things that happen.

We don't know why it happens. But we have a tested faith that in the long run, either we will understand or we will realize we don't have to understand. God has his ways in the world, and we believe that our God's ways are perfect.

And so we are going to continue to trust him, even if in the short term, the outcome of God's reign in the world seems very negative to us. Why did you let that tree fall on my house? Well, because he's God. Now, do you believe that God is good? It's not good that a tree fell on your house.

But this is a world of rebellion against God. And so things happen that remind us all that not all is well in the world, but all is well with you and God. And I must say, I didn't like rebelling against God.

I was just aware as a human being. Why my house? Why not somebody else's house? But these are questions that everybody on Earth has to deal with. And many of us find our way to a faith in the God who sent his son to give us a connection with him that lifts us above living or dying, whether a tree falls on our house.

Because, especially in the light of eternity, that tree in my yard is not going to make a big difference. And I must say, the tree could have been a bigger tree. It could have fallen in a worse way.

And for all kinds of reasons, I realized within an hour or two of beginning to survey all the damage around my house, I realized how we had been spared. Possibly injured by death, because around our house are lots of trees. All the trees fell, and we had just gotten visitors from another city.

And on any other day, when they arrived, we would have been out in those woods. And that wind hit out of nowhere. And in maybe ten seconds, it wiped out the whole hillside, and there are no trees standing.

And these are trees that are somewhat up to a meter in diameter, and it broke them off. It broke them off high. It uprooted them.

It broke them off on the ground. Any place out in there where the path goes right through there, we would have been there, but we weren't. Because providentially, by the same God who sent the wind, God sent us somewhere else.

So, we weren't where we would normally be in those circumstances. So, it's not wrong to want a full reward in the end. Whatever that means in God, it's not wrong to realize there is work to do.

It's glorious work, but it's work. But in addition to the fulfillment of the work we have now, which, you know, we learn fulfillment in our daily labors. It's a glorious thing to live for the Lord, as long as he gives us energy, and as long as he gives us the ability to think and maybe to move and to do things in his name.

But that compensation, so to speak, is nothing compared to what we will receive when we see him as he is. So, let's move to the warning, 9 through 11. Everyone who goes on ahead, and now this is in connection with watch yourselves, and the deceivers.

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching, there's that word abide again, stays stable, stays rooted, stays grounded. 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 to your house or give him any greeting. For whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. So, by going ahead, like all these words, there's controversy in the literature about them.

But I'm going to take that to mean anybody who is guilty of what John warns against. John and the apostolic message can be marked out. There's a body of confession, there's a message, there are commandments, there's a social presence, there's a physical presence, there's a theological presence of God.

If you get outside that domain, you're going ahead. And he even defines what he means by the word and does not abide in the teaching of Christ. Wherever you go, conceptually, logistically, physically, wherever you go, and it takes you outside the teaching of Christ.

And this could be the teaching about Christ, it could be Christ's teaching, it could be both. When you get outside that, you don't have God. So that's the first part of this warning.

Secondly, the teaching is the truth. He mentions truth a lot and teaching is another word for it. The teaching by Christ, the teaching about Christ, and this teaching and this body of doctrine is an indicator of possessing God or not.

Possessing God or not. Now, as I say one more time in the next lecture, I'll point out how critical the teaching is and how by people's teaching, by definition, they can rule themselves out of the domain of the reign of Christ because they don't receive the Christ that the apostles taught and that the scripture commends to us. So these verses warn about going outside that domain.

They warn us about straying from the truth itself. And then there are these words about greeting or hosting. And I think it refers to traveling missionaries, evangelists, and church workers like Gaius, who is commended for hosting.

In 3 John 5, 6, 7, and 8. You know, there are brothers who come to John. The brothers go to Gaius, and Jesus says You should greet these people. They're going out.

They're going out in the name. They're not being compromised by allowing people who are hostile to Christianity to host them because that would require them to compromise their testimony to Christ. Where the gospel flourishes, there will always be rivals and there will always be counterfeits.

And we have to decide who we're going to support, who we're going to acknowledge as fellow believers in the faith. Because we're supposed to make disciples of everybody. We're supposed to have a Christian influence on them.

And you don't treat people that you know are Christians in the same way you treat people that you know are not Christians or that you have no reason to think are Christians. So I don't think this is speaking directly to the question. If you have a

brother or sister, or you have a parent they're not a Christian, and they want to come and visit you.

I don't think it's speaking to whether you should say hello to them or whether you should let them stay at your house overnight or for the weekend because they're not Christians. These verses have often caused a lot of anguish because people say, well, this friend wants to visit me, but he's not a Christian. And this says I can't receive him to my house.

I think in the context of Second and Third John, it's talking about giving the greeting to a Christian brother or supporting the work of whatever these people stand for. Making your house a missionary outpost for deceivers. Or people who don't teach the teachings of Christ, supporting them actively in their mission.

So, there's a little fuzziness here about how to apply this. And if you're struggling with that, I urge you to talk to pastor leaders and see how this may apply in your locality. Because in lots of parts of the world, we have lots of refugees.

We have coming and going who we recognize as brothers and sisters. And who do we maybe give hospitality to? But we're not treating them like Christians, per se. We're treating them as people whom God calls on us to do good to all people, especially those in the household of faith.

And then he says, farewell. And I'm getting close to saying farewell to you for this lecture. Though I have much to write to you, I'd 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, and so I take that to be the children of the local church that John represents, or the believers, wherever John is, that are constituting an ecclesia, an assembly of believers, the children of that church, the church members, greet you. This largely repeats the ending of 3 John.

It's very close to the same wording. Certainly, the same idea. And completing joy is a great way to complete this lecture.

Completing joy echoes sentiments that relate to Jesus in the fourth gospel. Also we're going to see that in John's letter, we call 1 John, he writes 1 John so that our joy or your joy may be complete. But the beloved disciple, John, the son of Zebedee, the writer of 2 and 3 John, carries on an important part of the heritage of what he and Jesus shared.

Actually, we see this first in John the Baptist. In John chapter 3, John says, The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.

Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. And then he goes on to say, he must increase, referring to Christ, and I must decrease. But John's joy was complete in seeing God's promise in the Messiah, who he was the forerunner of, seeing that fulfilled.

And then later in the upper room discourse on the night he was betrayed, Jesus says to his disciples, These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. Remember, Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit has some markers. There's evidence of his presence in a life.

And the first evidence is love. And the second evidence and the second product of the Holy Spirit is called fruit, as mentioned in Galatians 5. The second fruit of the Spirit is joy. Love, joy, shalom, or peace.

Jesus says, truly, truly, I say to you, and this is in a chapter where he talks about persecution. You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You know, when Jesus died, made a lot of people happy, and it utterly shattered his disciples.

You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. He gives the analogy of a woman having a child. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come.

But when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish of joy that a human being has been born into the world. Mothers really, really desire children and grandmothers also, and great grandmothers and grandfathers if they're still around too. New children bring great joy, often after great travail.

Because not only is labor difficult, but sometimes the pregnancy creates a lot of tension and a lot of suffering. So also, you have sorrow now. Jesus is in the upper room.

He's telling them all the bad things that are about to happen and that they don't understand. You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. Until now, you have asked nothing in my name.

Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. There's that language again of fullness of joy. Finally, in Jesus' so-called high priestly prayer in John 17, he says to the Father, But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may, that is, my followers, may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

So, I leave you with this note that studying John's letters is work. Listening to lectures is its own kind of labor. Giving lectures is its own kind of labor.

But whatever labor we perform in and for the Lord and in fellowship with him and fellowship with each other, there is a joy that attaches to it. It's a joy of the moment. It's a joy of the fulfillment of God's promise as we live out what it is that he has to say to us through his word.

And so I wish you that peace and that joy as we conclude this lecture. Thank you.