

The Marks of the Christian

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 January 2018

Preacher: Doug Norman

[0 : 0 0] Today, as we look at 2 John, it's the first part of a look at the latter epistles of the Apostle John, and next week we'll look at 3 John.

But in considering what the topic, the key topic to 2 John is, I have called the sermon, The Marks of the Christian.

Because I think that the Apostle John, in all three of his epistles, actually focuses on ways that you, the believer, can test the validity of your faith.

Just because it's a short book, doesn't mean that it is not packed with lots of things to talk about. And when I started my preparation, it reminded me of another short book that had a huge impact on my early Christian life.

It's this book. It's called The Mark of a Christian by Francis Schaeffer. It's not even 60 pages in this small format. But it's a book I would recommend that every one of you should read in your lifetime.

[1 : 1 2] I gave a copy of it to my wife, Carol. We can't remember if it was just before or just after we got married. But I gave it to her because I thought it was one of the most vital ways that I could contribute as a husband, as a newly minted husband, to her Christian growth.

And don't scorn it, this book, or to John, just because it's short. I hope you'll keep your Bibles open because we'll be looking very closely at almost every verse.

So if you would just cast your eyes on verses 1 to 3 as we look at John's opening greetings. And the first question with all epistles that you have to ask is, who's being addressed?

Who's the letter written to? On the surface, we might quickly conclude that this is a small house church written to a woman well known to John. And whilst this is not impossible, most commentators agree that John is rather referring in the feminine to a local church, which is not unusual.

It's common practice right through the scriptures in Hosea, Ephesians, Revelation. And what can we deduce about this church?

[2 : 4 1] Obviously, if you look at John's opening remarks, she is a beloved community to him. One that he says he loves in the truth. Furthermore, this church, John says, is loved by all who know the truth.

So that means they are united. They are united to the extended body of true believers everywhere. And this fellowship with John and with other believers is on a specific basis.

It's on a shared knowledge of the truth. Take a look. See how many times you'll see that term, the truth, being mentioned in these first three verses.

It's there. Know the truth. Love the truth. Walking in the truth. Which means immediately that we have to ask ourselves, what does the truth mean?

And the first place you should go to get the answer is in the gospel of John. And if you remember John chapter 14, verse 6 from Sunday school, you'll know what the answer is.

[4 : 01] Right? Anyone quote it? I am the way, the truth and the life. Yes. There is also a hint in verse 3, actually, what John's alluding to when it says, Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.

So what then is the truth? It is nothing less than Jesus Christ himself and him dwelling in us. Besides being a beloved community, we also know from the earlier epistle and even from verse 7 onwards, that it's a beleaguered community.

It's a community that's under attack. And it's under attack from false teachers. These false teachers have come into the church and possibly they've already drawn away some from the faith.

They've come with a different message than that which was originally preached by the earlier evangelists, by Paul and the others that came in, especially if this was Ephesus.

And so, what do we have here? We have a church that is really feeling the heat. And it's a church that needs encouragement to persevere in the truth.

[5 : 20] Not unlike the church in Melbourne today. If you're not feeling the heat, I don't know if you realize you're in the kitchen. But the heat is on the church. It's on all over us.

And I think we need the same encouragement that John is giving to his readers here. Lastly, it's a chosen community.

John refers to it as the elect lady or the chosen lady. And because election is such a massive topic and one that I'm not brave enough to cover here, suffice it to say that scripture is full of it.

It refers to the people of God, both Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament as the chosen people. But I'll leave it to Andrew Price to explain election more comprehensively when we encounter it at the right time.

In Romans and Ephesians, Galatians and other places. However, I couldn't shirk from mentioning the topic here though. Because it begs a very important question for every one of us.

[6 : 31] And that question, the question you have to ask yourself is, how do I know that I am chosen? And for most of us this morning, I think that's the more important question.

Far more important than understanding the mechanics of election. Of how God is at work in election and predestination. And the answer to it, I will try to hopefully be able to show you from John, is to be found in the rest of this book.

John concludes this opening greeting with a slight change to the normal expression. You know, grace, mercy and peace. He says, grace, mercy and peace are with us all.

But he puts it in a context. When? In truth and love. And these two words, truth and love, are the key to everything I'm going to say today.

And it's the key to the answer to that question we've posed. How do I know I'm chosen? And the crux of John's arguments are found in those next three verses.

[7 : 41] So if you'll keep looking at verses four through six. And in it, John expresses great joy that some.

He says some of the church are walking in the truth. Now, that's a bit strange. And we but we're there two possibilities about why he refers only to some.

The sad and negative option could be that there are already some in the community who have fallen away. They've been led astray and are no longer walking in the truth.

The more positive explanation could simply be that John only knows some of those. And he's referring to those that he knows are walking in the truth and therefore is a source of great joy for him.

And we should we should. Take John's example, because whenever we find those walking in the truth, it should be a source of great joy for us, too.

[8 : 48] I have my oldest daughter about to get married. And one of the great joys is that she walks in the truth and she is marrying someone who is walking in the truth.

And that is a matter of great rejoicing. So then walking in the truth, however, is the first part of the answer to the question.

How can I know that I am chosen? And John 1250 tells us that walking in the truth is a commandment of the father. It's a commandment that leads to eternal life.

So where are we? We've already said that the truth is Jesus Christ. So then walking in the truth literally means walking in Christ.

Notice two in this passage or in this section. How many times the word command appears. If you counted, it's four times. And what should we conclude from that?

[9 : 56] Clearly, we are discussing something that is not an optional extra. This is essential. We're dealing with essentials here. Essentials of the faith.

What marks us as being chosen is knowing Christ. If you don't know Christ, you are not chosen.

Well, you can't conclude that. Pray that you would know him. Pray that he would, through the spirit, reveal himself to you. But how does this look practically?

It is confessing the truth of Jesus Christ as God's word in the flesh and living in harmony with him.

And 1 John 1 verse 6. He says, If we claim to have fellowship with him, Jesus, and yet walk in darkness, we lie.

[11 : 00] And do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. And now the real kicker, the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.

So walking in Jesus, walking in the truth, doesn't mean just some intellectual assent to his existence.

It's not an acceptance that he was a good teacher. His teachings constitute a good way to live. That's not sufficient. Rather, it requires you to believe with all your heart that Jesus is not simply a man.

But that he is God in the flesh. And furthermore, it means that Jesus has to be at the very center of your life. He's not on the periphery.

He's not an intellectual concept. His instructions, commands, his example, his sacrifice, his gospel mission.

[12 : 14] All those things at the end of the day have to be at the center of your life too. They have to be the things that motivate your decisions. They have to be the things that animate your desires.

They should place the greatest claim on your resources. Your time, your money, your skills, your home. Basically, they should command your total attention.

He should command your total attention. And if you thought that was difficult, the apostle goes on to be even more challenging. Because in 1 John 2 verse 6, he says, Whoever claims to live in him, or walk in him, must walk as Jesus did.

So, are you walking as Jesus did? Well, you might ask me, how did he walk? Well, the best description I can think of of how Jesus walked would be to say he walked in love.

Love characterized every interaction he had while he was on earth. Even, I would argue, when he was being assertive about the purity of the temple, making a whip and chasing out the money changers.

- [13 : 34] Even when he was calling out the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees. So, if you are in any doubt, cast your eyes at verse 6.

Jesus' command, not his request, not a good idea, his command is that you walk in love. So, what have we had so far?

Walking in truth and walking in love. And these seem, to me, to be clearly two sides of the same coin.

You can't have one without the other. There is no truth without love. There is no love without truth. 1 Corinthians 13 verse 6 says, Love rejoices in the truth.

Or in reverse, Ephesians 4 verse 15 says, We speak the truth in love. So, if you are in the truth. Jesus dwells in your heart.

- [14 : 42] Then, because he lives there, you can't help. You cannot help living a life of love for your brother and for your neighbor. In the great commandment that Jesus gave back in John 13, the one that he called a new commandment I give you to love one another, he says, As I loved you, so you must love one another.

And there is a reason. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. So, John, in his epistle says, Walking in love is not a new commandment.

Rather, it's the continuation of the commandment Jesus has already given. And it must be that single greatest evidence that here in this community are true believers.

It is through this obedience of mutual evident love that the church will withstand. The church will withstand those outside trying to divide her.

And the church will be a witness. A witness to the truth, to a lost world, that there is a solution. In the book, I refer to Schaeffer makes a very challenging case.

- [16 : 02] That's why I suggest you read it. I can't go into the detail, but he really takes that great commandment. And he makes a case that there is what is required of us who are true believers, that we need to have a special love for the elect, i.e. all those who are chosen.

The true believers in our midst and throughout the world. Of course, that does presuppose that we can recognize who true believers are. They will be those who claim Christ, who know Christ, who have Christ living in their hearts.

And to those, the quality of love required of us is massive. As it said, we love as Jesus has loved us.

And think about it. What will it mean? It will be costly love. It will be visible love. It will be filled with forgiveness for wrongs suffered.

Think about Jesus on the cross. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. It will always regret when it has to do hard things like discipline, even as it is faithful and obedient in doing it.

- [17 : 27] It will always try to maintain unity, even when there is disharmony in the body. So the marks of the Christian, how you will know that you are the chosen people of God, objective evidence is this.

Are you walking in truth and walking in love? And John goes on to say why these true marks, these marks of true belief are so necessary.

If you go to verse 7, verses 7 through verse 9. What does he say? He says there will be many deceivers. That's why.

That's why we need to have the true evidence, the evidence of true belief. Jesus promised that they would be there. The apostles' letters are full of it.

And our experience has to be that it continues, even to this day. There are many deceivers. And they're not just on the fringes.

[18 : 39] They're in the mainstream church too. And the main topic of their deceit always, always revolves around who Jesus is.

This particular group of false teachers were denying that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and therefore the reality of his atoning death.

But in every generation, we will be surrounded. We'll be surrounded by those who teach some other view. Particularly about Jesus, his gospel, his kingdom, his sacrifice.

Not what the Bible teaches. John doesn't mean to be the same. They won't acknowledge him, or they'll distort his teachings. And their objective in doing so is to divide us for their own purposes.

John doesn't mince his words either when he describes them. He calls them for what they are. Antichrists. These are hard words in this day and age.

[19 : 51] Don't expect not to take some flack if you call some preacher an Antichrist. But John does it.

John says it. In 1 John 2.18, he says, Dear children, this is the last hour. And as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have come.

This is how we know that it is the last hour. John and his church were in the last hour, and so are we. And the Antichrists will abound. They're opposed to Jesus and his message because they are of their father, the devil.

They want to distress and divide the true church of God. That's the purpose of Satan. And specifically, the threat that these false teachers pose to us is that they want to entice us to run ahead, ahead of what the Bible has revealed.

John tells us that to have the son is to have the father. But he also says the inverse is true. Anyone who does not continue in the teachings of Christ does not have God.

[21 : 08] We live in a society where lots of people want God. They want a kind of spirituality. But preferably without Jesus, without that message. But John's having no truck with that.

Because recall that Sunday school verse, John 14 verse 6, the second part, no one comes to the father but by me. So what could running ahead, though, entail?

What do you think it means? Well, I think that it's to go beyond what the Bible explicitly teaches. And unfortunately, you're going to encounter that all over the place in this day and age.

So-called progressive interpretations of God's command or the gospel. Additional revelation, unfortunately, in many charismatic churches, which often contradicts scripture directly.

Simply making stuff up. Sorry if that offends somebody, but to satisfy ears that only want to hear of health, wealth, and prosperity rather than suffering and hardship and endurance, which the scriptures are truly full of.

[22 : 28] A continual pursuit of the novel. New ways of worshipping that are at best unhelpful and at worst blasphemous.

Verse 8 warns us, watch out. Watch out that we don't lose our reward, that thing for which we have worked, because we've been deceived into believing a different gospel.

The work of God, for which we would get a reward, is this. To believe in the one he has sent.

So, John's recipe is simple. We must continue walking in the truth and walking in love. And only then can we withstand these deceivers and their false teaching.

And John doesn't pull his punches in telling us what our response to these deceitful teachers should be either. Look at verses 10 and 11.

[23 : 38] If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work. His instruction is clear.

Unless the teaching conforms with the teaching of Christ and his apostles do not provide hospitality to those bringing this different gospel. Literally, he is saying, don't greet them even.

But have some of you thrown up your hands in horror? Isn't this unloving? Haven't you been telling us of the importance of walking in love?

Isn't this a contradiction? Well, to understand this better, we have to consider the function of hospitality in those days carefully so that we don't get this message wrong.

For the early church, bringing someone into your home, and remember, a lot of the churches were in homes, had connotations of patronage within the community and even meant that a visitor was accorded a degree of protection under local law.

[24 : 48] So, this was a big deal. Similarly, the greeting was not simply saying, how are you? Hi. How you addressed someone in public accorded them standing and recognition.

So, John's not suggesting here that we deny the cup of tea or water or even spurn someone publicly. That's not what he's talking about.

Rather, he is telling the church, you cannot provide these deceivers, these antichrists, with a forum to propagate this false message. Nor can you accord them recognition as representatives of Christ.

You cannot accord them, you cannot conflate them as being true believers. The chosen walk in love and walk in the truth.

These deceivers are not doing that. And by the same token, anyone who does invite them into their communities or lets them preach these doctrines in their churches, John says, shares in their wicked work.

[26 : 03] It's a hard word, I said. It's not mere association, which is unacceptable, but it is the promotion and endorsement of heretical teaching that's prohibited here.

And John's warning in verse 8 is stark. Being soft on false teaching means running the risk of serious spiritual suffering.

This means that we have to be discerning about the teaching we listen to. It means that we have to be biblically competent, biblically astute, so that we can recognize false doctrine.

It means having a Berean spirit. If you know who the Bereans were, they heard Paul, went home, read their scriptures to confirm that what Paul was saying was in fact true.

In the modern church, this text has not been well received, because at its heart it says truth trumps tolerance. And tolerance is a new idol, isn't it?

[27 : 14] Walking in love can never, never be an excuse for ignoring the undermining of God's truth. You see, uncritical hospitality of false and deceptive teaching is in fact ultimately unloving.

It's unloving to our body when we let false teachers in, but it's even unloving to the teacher themselves. Because without the truth that there is only one way and that is Christ, we are ultimately all perishing.

And John finishes this letter in verses 12 and 13, and his final words are a reflection of the practical outworking of his teaching.

he sends greetings from a sister church, which earnestly seems to care for their spiritual well-being. And he says that he longs, or he hopes to visit and talk with them face to face.

His own heartfelt Christian affection for these fellow believers is quite evident. Right at the start of the passage, John had joy at knowing there were those walking in the truth.

[28 : 39] Now, at the end, John wants to complete their mutual joy by supporting and upholding them in person. It's precisely this kind of fellowship in the truth that protects us from falling into falsehood.

the marks of the true Christian walking in love, walking in the truth, will only take root and be strengthened and manifest themselves within the greater community of true believers.

There are no solo Christians. We do not and cannot walk alone. if you want to walk in the truth and walk in love, you have to do it with their fellow true believers.

And just as John's desire was for their joy to be complete, how can we have that same complete joy? By abiding in the truth.

as a church, Holy Trinity, we have to protect our pulpits and all our teaching occasions with a zeal for the truth. The truth that Jesus is the only way to God and without him, all are perishing, all are lost.

[30 : 06] John said in the passage even that when you leave Jesus behind, you lose all possibility of a life with God. how will we have the same complete joy as them?

By obeying him. Not only that we believe the truth about Jesus, but that we seek to obey his commands and walk as he did, in spite of opposition from the world and unbelievers.

How will we have the same complete joy as them? By loving your brother and your neighbor. Christian love is an obedient response to God's revelation of himself in Jesus, which in turn means a life of costly service to one another.

other. By this kind of love, the world will know we are his disciples and we will know that we are chosen because we will be showing the marks of the Christian.

Let us pray. Father, we just ask that this word would take root in our hearts, that we would obey it, that we would seek to follow you in all of it.

[31 : 26] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.