

2 & 3 John

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. Father, may the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable and acceptable and guided by your Holy Spirit.

! Father, may the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable and acceptable and guided by your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. May we be seated. I don't think there's been a time in St. John's history so far as I've been seated. I am aware where we've tried to cover two whole books of the Bible in one sermon. So let's try something new this morning. We are covering second and third letters of John.

We've just finished a series on the first letter of John. And the second and third letters of John both have to do with the question of hospitality. Who should you welcome? Who should you not welcome? And why?

Now before we jump in, I think it's important to see that this question of hospitality has a context. It has a social context and it has a scriptural or a gospel context.

And the social context is that hospitality in the ancient world in the first century was absolutely key to the spread of the gospel in the ancient world. So all the cities were connected by a matrix of roads that had been built by the Romans.

[1 : 22] This was a good thing because it allowed fluid travel of missionaries and ministers, of prophets and preachers from one town and one city to the next so that they could spread the good news about Jesus.

They could plant churches. They could train leaders and establish leaders in local churches. They could then go back and visit and do pastoral care and encourage and equip and continue to teach and tell people to stay true to Christ.

But in the ancient world, there weren't any hotels, or at least there were very few hotels. And hotels were not a fancy thing like they are now, at least some of them.

They were actually seen as a bit sketchy and one's reputation could be marred if one attended it. It's definitely not a place for a minister or missionary to stay. So the question is, if you're going to have this interconnection of cities and pastors and missionaries bringing the gospel and encouraging churches and planting churches, then where are they going to stay?

And the answer was, they needed to stay in somebody's home. So the question of hospitality became very key to the spread of gospel mission and ministry in the ancient world.

[2 : 29] Now hold that thought. We'll circle back to it in a few minutes. The second context is not just the social context, but the scriptural context or the gospel context of hospitality. Remember, 1 John was all about Christian truth and love.

It was about having a rich faith in the Lord Jesus and the truth about the Lord Jesus and following the robust call to love like Jesus. So truth and love.

And now, in the second and third letters, John is saying that hospitality is a key way in which Christian truth and love works its way out in our lives. John writes to show us how to love one another in truth, how to walk in the truth in love.

So this question of hospitality is very important, not only for the spread of the gospel in the ancient world, but also for how do we live out the gospel in our lives. And John is convinced that the world needs to have a very wide porch.

We should be welcoming all sorts of people to a living encounter with the living and true Jesus. But John also says that the church needs to have a very discerning heart and mind, a keen eye for false teaching that can draw us away from the living and true Jesus.

[3 : 45] So our question this morning is who should we welcome, who should we not welcome, and why? Let's begin with the negative, because that might be foremost in your minds.

Who should we not welcome? Interestingly, this is kind of the heart and the focus of the second letter to John. I think you can find this on page 1025 of your Pew Bible if you go there with me. It's written by the elder John, so like a senior minister of churches in the area. Probably functions somewhat like a bishop does for us, a local bishop. He's writing to an elect lady and her church. Now, some people understand this to be an individual woman and her family, but it's more likely what John is playing on is he's personifying the church as a chosen lady and all of its individual members as a children.

So the first letter John wrote, and it was circulated amongst a bunch of churches. The second letter he writes is to one of those congregations and the members in it. It's actually quite a beautiful thing. [4 : 51] In the scriptures, you hear the church described as the bride of Christ. And here you see a letter that embodies that truth and the way she is addressed. And it's a letter that's full of pastoral affection and love and blessing and goodwill.

She is precious to the Lord, and she is precious to John. But John is very clear. You should not welcome false teachers who do not confess the truth about Christ. And the heart of it is in verses 10 and 11.

He says, If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, and the previous verse had talked about the teaching of Christ, does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

So this is where I want to loop back to the social context that I talked about at the beginning. Do you remember it? In order for missionaries and ministers and preachers and prophets to do the ministry God has called them to all over the place, they needed houses to stay in, and people had to host them.

But also in the ancient world, there weren't like big church buildings like the one that we're in now or that we're hoping to build someday in the future. People gathered in homes for churches.

[6 : 05] So if you welcomed a minister or missionary into your house or prophet or preacher into your home, the whole town assumed that you supported their message in their ministry.

And even more, they assumed that you were giving a platform for that person in your church that met in your home or in the church that met in your city. So these verses here are not just about like, don't have people that don't agree with you over for dinner.

These verses are about not supporting and enabling the ministry of false teachers in your homes and in your churches. So why is this important? Well, John gives us the reasons.

He gives us three reasons, actually, in verses 7 through 9. In verse 7, he simply says, Why is this important? Because there are people who are going to try to deceive you.

Verse 7. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, and those who do not confess the coming of Christ Jesus in the flesh.

[7 : 06] Hold that. We're going to talk about that. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Here's this language of antichrist again. It's hard to imagine stronger language in the Bible.

And it refers to somebody that doesn't simply ignore Christ or think him irrelevant to their lives, although that's not good either. These are people who directly oppose Christ.

They're antichrist. They seek to discredit the eyewitness testimony of the apostles about Christ and the historic faith of the church in Christ. And their central claim is that Christ did not come into the flesh.

In other words, Christmas is a nice story, but it's fanciful history. The Son of God never became human. Now, you might wonder, why is John so hung up on this one thing?

Well, it's because everything hangs in the balance on it. If you deny this one thing, it's almost like an earthquake taking place in the middle of the ocean.

[8 : 03] It's just one event. But you soon realize that it launches a tsunami that devastates every other Christian belief. So if Jesus, the Son of God, was not born human, then it means that he did not live the life that we could not live.

If he was not born human, it means he did not bear our burdens and he did not heal our diseases. If he was not born human, it means his wounds did not purchase our forgiveness or our freedom.

His resurrection is just a myth and there's no hope after death. And we who believe in him are the most to be pitied. So you come to realize that if Christ did not come in the flesh, it's as if the whole Christian faith collapses like a house of cards.

So John says, beware. There are people who will want to deceive you on this note. And in verse 8, he goes on and says, and beware because none of you are immune.

Says verse 8, watch yourselves so that you may not lose what we have worked for. You hear John's pastoral heart. I've labored over you so that you may hold this faith to the end and you may win a full reward.

[9 : 11] Watch yourselves that you're not brought off course. And then in verse 9, he really lands the final blow. He says, if you're deceived about Christ, you lose God.

And God is everything. Verse 9, So you see what John's doing here.

He's saying don't welcome people who oppose the truth about Jesus, who are directly anti-Christ, into your church and give them a platform for their ministry and mission. Because it will derail people from the truth of Christ.

And the truth of Christ is the only way to enter into fellowship with God and one another. And if you lose the truth of Christ, you lose fellowship with God. And nothing is more precious to the Christian. I remember I got a rude awakening to this lesson in my first ministry post. I was 19 years old. So much wisdom to offer others. I was a summer intern for a high school group.

[10 : 21] And the pastor gave me the most important things to do. I set out all the chairs. I cleaned all the tables. I barbecued all the hot dogs. I did all the shopping.

It was wonderful. Great experience. And the cherry on top is he let me lead a Friday morning Bible study at Starbucks. Wonderful. Had about 15, 20 high schoolers there every Friday morning throughout the summer.

I don't remember what we were studying, honestly. But I do remember that about our third week, there was a man who asked to join our Bible study who was at Starbucks.

And I thought to myself, oh, I'm going to be the model of hospitality and generosity to these young high school students. Sure, welcome our group. At first, he just listened the first couple weeks.

But by the time we got to the third week with him, he started asking questions. And this increased.

And I came to find out that he actually was thoroughly opposed to the belief that Jesus was the Son of God.

[11 : 18] And what he ended up trying to do is turn all of our conversations in the scriptures back to sowing seeds of doubt about Jesus in these high schoolers' young minds, hearts and minds. And I went to my high school youth pastor and I was like, what do I do?

And he said, in order to love the flock, you are going to have to say to him, I'm happy to talk about these things one-on-one outside of this group. But you need to leave the group and you are no longer welcome to attend it.

My naivety as a young 19-year-old was exposed. And it was my first lesson in pastoral love. See, brothers and sisters, it's a good thing to welcome people.

Like, we want to be a church with a wide porch. Where we bring people that have genuine questions. People who are curious and exploring the Christian faith. They want to come and see who Jesus is. They want to hear.

They're seeking. They're really wrestling with the truth. We want a wide front porch. And we want to be a church where we offer hospitality to those people. But we do not want to offer hospitality to teachers who are opposing Christ and seeking to draw people away from him.

[12 : 22] John says, do not welcome them in your church. Do not support their ministry. Do not give them a platform for mission. Because too much is at stake. So that's 2 John.

The limit to hospitality. But 3 John is about the positive encouragement of hospitality. Who should we welcome then? Now, this is a lovely little letter infused with so much affection.

The affection of genuine friendship. John writes to his cherished friend, Gaius. And it reminds us that the gospel is not just for communities and families. It's for friends too. And John writes to commend the hospitality of Gaius.

As he's shown it to Christian evangelists and missionaries. If you flip over the page. Page 1026. 1026.

Let's look at verses 5 to 8 together. Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do. In all your efforts for these brothers and sisters.

[13 : 25] Strangers as they are. Who testify to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey. It's this assumption that they're on a journey. A missionary journey in a sense.

In a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name. Accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore, we ought to support people like these.

That we may be fellow workers or co-workers for the truth with them. So John's very clear in his third letter. Who should we welcome? We should welcome those who have the right message. He's already talked about that. But we should also welcome those who have the right motive. And that's what 3 John really lands on. There is a contrast between the wrong motive.

Which is highlighted. Or the right motive. Which is highlighted in verse 7. And the wrong motive. Which comes a number of verses later. So verse 7 highlights.

[14:22] What is the right motive for gospel ministry? It is ministry that is for the sake of God's name. And not selfish gain. So John says, You should offer hospitality to those who pray, Hallowed be your name.

Not to us, but to your name be glory, O God. You should offer hospitality to those who preach. There's salvation in no other name. And who praise the name that is above all names.

This is the person who does ministry with the right motive. But the wrong motive, we're given example in verses 9 through 10. It is very much the opposite. I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

Skip down a little bit. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to, and puts them out of the church. So you see what John is doing here.

He's saying those with the right motive, they simply seek to do what they're doing for the name of God, for the name of Jesus Christ. Whereas those that minister for the wrong motives, they are putting themselves first.

[15:30] And they're undermining the godly authority of the church, and they're refusing to offer hospitality to gospel-centered teachers and preachers who want to do ministry in their midst. And the really striking thing here is that for all John's concern about false teaching, he does not say Diotrephes is unorthodox.

He doesn't say there's any problem with his teaching, that there's any problem with his education or training, and that there's any lack of gifts for ministry. What is the problem? It's his personal ambition for himself to be at the center, and to be preeminent.

As one author aptly put it, personal vanity still lies at the root of most dissensions in every local church today. So what sort of teachers should you welcome into your church?

John tells us teachers with the right message and with the right motive. It needs to be the message of truth, but it needs to be the motive of love. We want the truth of Jesus to receive a warm welcome for the right reasons, in our families, in our friends, in our churches, and in our cities.

And so we offer hospitality to godly, gospel-centered, gracious ministers and missionaries as one of the ways that we can work for the truth together, as one of the ways that we can love one another in Vancouver and Canada and beyond.

[16:53] So let me get really practical here. What does hospitality include? That might be an obvious question. I think if you just do a simple survey of the scriptures, this doesn't include everything, but hospitality is not limited to, but it at least includes housing, food, and clothing, friendship and prayer, and money to enable ministry.

Housing, food, and clothing, friendship and prayer, and money to enable ministry. So that's the core message of 2 and 3 John, Christian truth and love, lived out through hospitality.

And notice how balanced John is. He talks about the limits of hospitality in 2 John, and he talks about the opportunities and possibilities for hospitality in 3 John. 2 John says, do not welcome false teachers into your home and church.

Don't support and enable their ministry. And 3 John says, welcome instead those who teach the truth for the right reasons. It is a faithful thing to do. So with that in mind, friends, I want to take just a few minutes to encourage you and exhort you in light of what John has said to us.

The first, I want to begin with encouragement. There are many ways I already see you living this out in your lives together. I feel like very well, so many people could say to you, beloved, it is a faithful thing that you do in all your efforts for the brothers and sisters.

[18:26] And I just want to name a few things that I see in your midst. The money that you give, every dollar that you give to the church or church planting or artidzo is in some way an act of hospitality, supporting and enabling the ministry of people who are proclaiming the truth of Christ, partnering with them in the work of the gospel, people that come here to share God's name and people that are sent out to share God's name.

Your giving is an act of hospitality, and you do well. Second, your friendship and the prayer that you offer. So many of you aren't content with just keeping your hands off.

You want to partner with people in friendship and prayer. And I see this especially in the Malawi committee and the mission committee, who are partnering with people all over the globe.

And their ministry isn't just like, let's dish out money and hope that it does some good. They see their ministry as spiritual friendship, as being partners in the gospel, as laboring in prayer.

And the best parts of those meetings are right in the middle when they spend time praying for each person by name. It's the sense that it is an act of hospitality to actually partner with somebody in mission and ministry.

[19 : 44] And your friendship and your prayer to so many around the world, it is a good thing that you do for the gospel. And third and finally, it's your love for the truth of the gospel. I love this about you.

There's this unwavering commitment to the ministry of the word in season and out of season, an ever-deepening hunger for Christ, and a willingness to hold your leaders accountable to this.

This too is a part of hospitality. Because a church that does not treasure God's word will not know when someone has departed from it. And a church that does not stand for and defend the truth is a church that will not ultimately be hospitable to teachers of the truth.

So the way you give generously, the way you offer friendship and prayer, and the way you cling to the truth of the gospel, in these ways, it is a faithful thing that you do, says John.

You are co-workers for the truth of Christ. Now an exhortation. Do not be deceived, though. There are false teachers.

[20 : 52] Now let me give you two little examples. One example is kind of what I'm going to call modern mystics who are fuzzy on Christ. Another example is modern podcasters who are cynical about the church.

Modern mystics who are fuzzy about Christ. One of the most dangerous things is things that are just a little bit Christian. So they're not fully pagan and anti-Christ, but they are a little untruth shrouded in a slice of truth.

So I'm thinking here of someone, for example, just to name one person, like Richard Rohr. A clever, poetic, intentional, speaks Christian lingo, but commends a religion of mystical experience without Christ.

It's spirituality without the clarity of the truth. And it's very alluring, but ultimately it ends up being very harmful. And the second thing is modern podcasters.

I've noticed that there's a lot of podcasts out there these days. I think everybody, I get like recommended two different podcasts every week. I don't know about you. But I've noticed that there are, there's a niche world of church bashing podcasts.

[22 : 06] Now I kind of understand this because in one sense, there's a lot of people who have been badly hurt and completely unjustly treated by the church. But what ends up happening sometimes is out of that hurt, people end up throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

And the church becomes the root of all evils. And they end up trying to discredit the church and its spiritual authority by questioning its essential beliefs.

And this can be a very sneaky thing. That's where I find the imagery of people running ahead that John uses in 2 John. It's so interesting. Because it's this sense of like, we have evolved past Christ. We have, we've, we actually, we have a new discovery, a special knowledge. You know, the theologians in the church have thought and taught this for 2,000 years, but have actually discovered a new enlightened take on things.

And this can be something that is very deceptive because progress is not always necessarily better. And a new take is not always the right take.

[23 : 13] So there's this way in which we need to be careful about a modern mysticism that does not have Christ at the center and modern podcasters who are angry with the church.

And so they end up leaving the church's beliefs about Jesus behind. Now, why do we do this?

Because our greatest joy is to see others walking in the truth.

Christians are people who love the truth and tell the truth and walk in the truth and love in truth. And truth in Christ is the only source of our fellowship with God and with one another. That's why I think it's so beautiful that the letter ends so profoundly on a personal note.

He basically says, I have tons of things to write to you, but I'd much rather not use ink and paper. Instead, I would like to come talk to you face to face so that our joy can be complete. See, the whole purpose of the letter is that there would be deep fellowship between John and the churches that he is pastoring and that their fellowship indeed would be with the Father and with the Son. So he says to us, apply Christian truth and love in your life. Do not welcome false teachers who will lead you or others away from Christ. but support, encourage, welcome, enable, receive people who are upholding the truth of Christ.

[24 : 33] For in that is your life and that is your eternal joy. My brothers and sisters, it is a joy to be in this ministry with you together. In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.