

Books of the Bible Series:

II John: Truth and Love

An Old Man Gets Right to the Point

Karen LeFevre

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2 JOHN - TRUTH AND LOVE

An old man gets right to the point....

When I first took another look at this book, I found out that it is a short but loaded book.

WARM-UP: The human experience

List several examples of universal human experiences... events, processes, or stages of life that all or most people have experienced.

- You can list experiences that might be gender-specific or not.
- Try to give examples that aren't limited to the place or time in which someone lives.

Warm-up Activity: (Pass out index cards...In one minutes, make a list of human processes or stages that most people have experienced)

One minute to read some of the responses: (Listen for things Jesus might have experienced!) First steps, crying and laughing, birth, puberty, first kiss, first crush, first job, graduation, friendship, going to school, childbirth, fighting w parents, marriage, adolescence, death, celebration,

shared language and desires, being parents, losing baby teeth, death of parents, tripping and falling down, liking someone who doesn't like you back, becoming old enough to go out on your own.

The point is that it's hard to think about Jesus experiencing most of these things. People in the first century also wrestled with Jesus being God and man. This tension is in this letter.

I like the way
Eugene Peterson
translates this
letter:

¹⁻² My dear congregation, I, your pastor, love you in very truth. And I'm not alone—everyone who knows the Truth that has taken up permanent residence in us loves you.

³ Let grace, mercy, and peace be with us in truth and love from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, Son of the Father!

⁴⁻⁶ I can't tell you how happy I am to learn that many members of your congregation are diligent in living out the Truth, exactly as commanded by the Father. But permit me a reminder, friends, and this is not a new commandment but simply a repetition of our original and basic charter: that we love each other. Love means following his commandments, and his unifying commandment is that you conduct your lives in love. This is the first thing you heard, and nothing has changed.

Don't Walk Out on God

⁷ There are a lot of smooth-talking con artists loose in the world who refuse to believe that Jesus Christ was truly human, a flesh-and-blood human being. Give them their true title: Deceiver! Antichrist!

⁸⁻⁹ And be very careful around them so you don't lose out on what we've worked so diligently in together; I want you to get every reward you have coming to you. Anyone who gets so progressive in his thinking that he walks out on the teaching of Christ, walks out on God. But whoever stays with the teaching, stays faithful to both the Father and the Son.

¹⁰⁻¹¹ If anyone shows up who doesn't hold to this teaching, don't invite him in and give him the run of the place. That would just give him a platform to perpetuate his evil ways, making you his partner.

¹²⁻¹³ I have a lot more things to tell you, but I'd rather not use paper and ink. I hope to be there soon in person and have a heart-to-heart talk. That will be far more satisfying to both you and me. Everyone here in your sister congregation sends greetings.

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by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

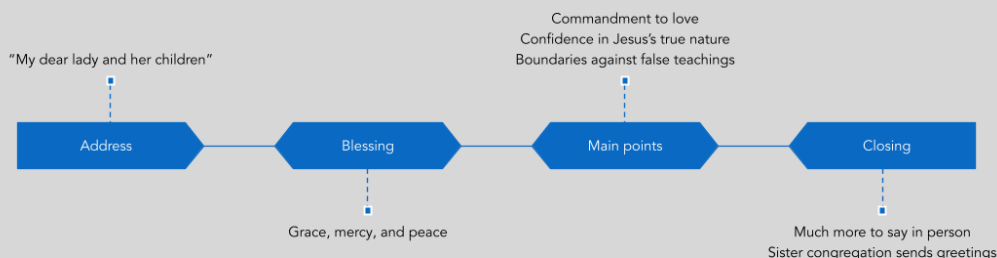
I want to pray now about what I'm going to talk about in this passage....

"Brevity is the soul of wit." –William Shakespeare

The original manuscript of this letter would have fit well onto one papyrus sheet.

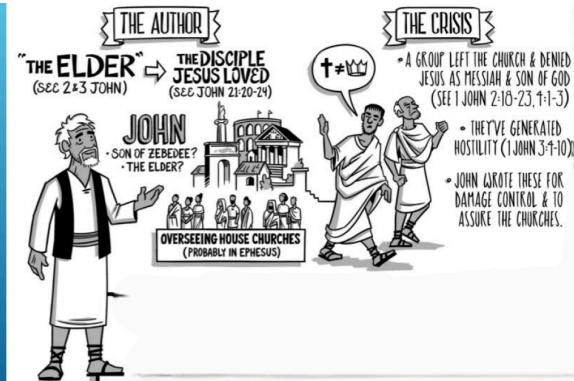
This quote is short, so is this letter. It fit on one papyrus sheet: John was frugal.

Outline of 2 John



John has an unique Address, a Blessing, Main Points and Closure.

The author has a common 1st century name. Traditionally, the apostle John was thought to be the author. But recently there is controversy over this:



Source: <https://bibleproject.com/>

“...if John is so concerned about whose witness we trust, it’s only right to inquire about his credentials.” – Alice Camille in *U.S. Catholic* (April 18, 2024)

What we don’t know for sure...

Both the author and the addressee are anonymous, but most modern scholars believe it was written by [John the Elder](#), who also wrote 1 and 3 John. “John the Elder” (“Ancient John”) was an old and well-respected church leader in Ephesus at the end of the 1st century/beginning of the 2nd century.

1 — “The elder” (*presbuteros*) has two meanings: (1) seniority (referring to age) or a senior citizen; (2) title (referring to office), a minister or teacher.

Modern scholarship suggests that the Gospel of John and 1, 2, 3 John were probably written by different individuals from the same faith community.

The writer could be John the Elder: an older person or maybe this might be a title “elder” which does refer to a specific early Christian leader in Ephesus, different from the Apostle John. Both came from the same faith community.

Open to interpretation...

“Elect lady” (*electa kyria*), to whom this letter is addressed, could refer to a prominent lady in the church.

Often translated as “my dear lady and her children”—most scholars today believe it’s a specific church or house church.

“The Elect Lady” could be a prominent woman in the church (who has a house church?), an individual.

We do know this about the early church in Ephesus:

What we do know about the 1st century church in Ephesus

Fringe group vulnerable to persecution

Jewish residents already had enough trouble in the melting pot of 1st century Ephesus, with a Greek pagan majority

Larger Roman Empire focused on emperor worship while the city's economy and culture centered on the goddess Artemis

A generation before, silversmith riot in response to Paul's ministry

There was tension in Ephesus: riots to Paul's ministry who undermined the silversmiths (it's all about money)

It is helpful to know the types of early church leaders, different from today

Three types of early church teachers

- Apostles...the OGs
- Locally appointed elders (often knew, or had known, the apostles directly)
- Traveling prophets were generally respected and welcomed

lack of accountability for traveling prophets + culture of hospitality opened the door to connen with alternative (*ahem*) interpretations of Jesus ---2 John was likely written in response to this trend.

See William Barclay's commentary, *The Letters of John and Jude* for more about this.

*OGs (Original Gangsters) who were there and saw and heard.

*People who knew the apostles (second-hand)

*People who showed hospitality to travelers; there were no hotels, perhaps putting them in danger of alternative interpretations of Jesus.

1st century Greco-Roman worldview

Material world clearly separated from the spiritual world

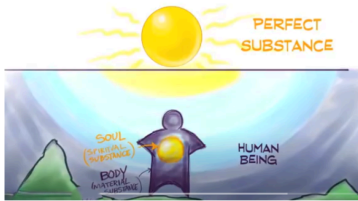
Perfect souls trapped inside pathetic physical bodies--- a struggle to transcend "this mortal coil" through mystical enlightenment (idea is addressed in Paul's letters to the Phillippians and the Colossians, for example)

The physical world was a poor reflection of the spiritual one---Many people believed that the physical world's creator was himself (itself) second-class ("children of a lesser god"). This Greco-Roman world view contrasted with the Jewish concept of God having created humanity in his perfect image and proclaiming them good.

Here are some beliefs in Ephesus:

Notice these roots of Western culture.

Dualism's effects on Christian culture



-by Steve Thomason

https://youtu.be/fe78DHHgF_s?list=PLy- OPEvg1acPSjpv8Rplery2DtRzklAz&t=62

Stop play at 3:20

We are in the shadowland; watch this video! Start at 1 min, go until 3:20.

I see some unintended consequences of combining Christianity with Greco-Roman thought.

Truth and Love: Confronting Gnostic "Christians"

The dualist worldview (physical = bad, spirit = good) interfered with belief in Jesus's lived humanity.

- Cerinthian Gnosticism: Jesus was a man on whom the Spirit came at His baptism and left at His crucifixion
- Docetic Gnosticism: Jesus was a phantom, not a physical person

There are two different groups: consider the kinds of things we see in the Gospels and Epistles that pushed against these viewpoints. God in human form was so difficult to comprehend!

This might sound like "Stay in your lane, God!" which is not Christianity.

Jesus's meal with the disciples in Luke 24

³⁶ While they [the disciples] were still talking about this [his appearance to the people on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus], Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." ⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.

The hands and feet are important because they had nailed, open wounds. This ties in with Thomas.

These are more stories about Jesus's incarnation!

More compelling stories of a down-to-earth Jesus:

Jesus's open wounds earned a "positive ID" from Thomas in John 20

Jesus cooked fish on the beach for his disciples in John 21

The incarnation

God took human form in the person of Jesus.

God has gone beyond saying creation is good: he has bone into it! This is mind-blowing. He has been recreating us, not just watching us from a distance,

not reflective of the Bette Midler song "From a Distance." He is working us from the inside out. He is getting his hand dirty literally and spiritually. He is not turning away from us. He looks at horrible images, not turning away. He's hands on and no holds barred. We see multiple stories of this: Jesus writes in the dirt, makes mud to heal a blind man. There is so much messiness on this earth. There is heresy that God cannot be human and real.

This is Paul's way of summing it up:

Romans 5:15

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

From Hebrews 2

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them,¹⁸ fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Here, we see Jesus needed to break the power of death by being in a body like ours, not a spiritual angelic body. He suffered, he was tempted, he knows what it's like to be caught.

More about why the incarnation matters

God has gone beyond saying his creation is good, but miraculously entered into it, subjecting himself to it (mind-blowing)!

God has been recreating us, not watching us "From a Distance" as Bette Midler claimed in her hit song. God has been reworking us from the inside out.

Through the person of Jesus, God has chosen to get his hands dirty, choosing to work in us and through us rather than turn away from us ("It's too awful—I can't watch!"). Neither does he safely act upon us from the outside. Completely hands-on, no holds barred....does it make you uncomfortable to think about?

And still more...

Because Christ saw nothing wrong with becoming fully human, there's no reason for body shame. There's also probably no place for shame or frustration with our human limitations. I'm not just talking about sin, our messing things up either by deliberate, selfish choices or clueless accidents. I'm also talking about not being able to do what we have intended to do because we're sick, tired, overwhelmed, aging, etc

But maybe there is a place for those griefs and frustrations? Maybe their place is to draw us even more into our Lord's compassion and complete love for us.

There is no room for body shame! Or shame about my limitations: Jesus had to sleep, he probably got sick and injured. Sometimes I'm hard on myself when I'm living in a clumsy body that does clueless things. Jesus meets me in this. Being sick, tired, old are the places that draw us more into Jesus' compassion and complete love for us.

Truth and Love

John warns against "deceivers" who deny that Jesus Christ was born, grew up, had ministered, was crucified, and resurrected from the dead in bodily form.

We should maintain healthy boundaries and not just extend it to anyone. What does this look like?

Matthew 7:15-20

¹⁵ “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

How might false prophets show up today?

Pastors with nationwide followings with compelling agendas and mission statements—all bunny trails leading us away from Jesus’s core message: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Social media influencers

Like = greeting them in the street?

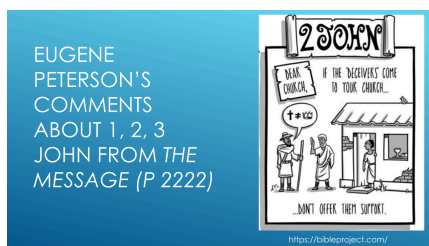
Subscribe, share, or living rent-free in your head = hospitality?

A lot of false teaching today centers around building achievements (working towards your personal dreams and checking off your bucket lists), gaining health and wealth for yourself, image-consciousness....a pendulum swing to materialism

Beware of “nice services” in large churches.

Beware of social media influencers; letting these people run free in your head is another form of hospitality.

The idea of achievement is a false teaching: also beware of health, wealth, bucket lists, image consciousness, and materialism



The two most difficult things to get straight in life are love and God. More often than not, the mess people make of their lives can be traced to failure or stupidity or meanness in one or both of these areas.

The basic and biblical Christian conviction is that the two subjects are intricately related. If we want to deal with God the right way, we have to learn to love the right way. If we want to love the right way, we have to deal with God the right way. God and love can't be separated.

John's three letters provide wonderfully explicit direction in how this works. Jesus, the Messiah, is the focus: Jesus provides the full and true understanding of God; Jesus shows us the mature working-out of love. In Jesus, God and love are linked accurately, intricately, and indissolubly.

But there are always people around who don't want to be pinned down to the God Jesus reveals, to the love Jesus reveals. They want to make up their own idea of God, make up their own style of love. John was pastor to a church (or churches) disrupted by some of these people. In his letters we see him reestablishing the original and organic unity of God and love that comes to focus and becomes available to us in Jesus Christ.

....

John's call to the Christ-follower: trust in Christ's divinity and humanity, lived out through acts of genuine, selfless love

“Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize

