

To the Elect Lady

by Bob Bruton

Bob Bruton's sermon on 'To the Elect Lady' emphasizes the importance of love and truth in Christian fellowship and warns against false teachings.

Duration: 21:37

Scripture: Genesis 2:17, Psalm 119:10, Psalm 119:30, Isaiah 8:2, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:3

Topics: "Elect Lady"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not just talking about our faith, but also living it out in our actions. He refers to the commandment to walk in truth, which he believes goes all the way back to Adam in the Garden of Eden. The speaker rejoices when he finds some of the elect lady's children walking in truth, highlighting that even the best leaders may not have perfect success in teaching others. He also emphasizes the importance of love and pleads with others to obey God's commandments. The sermon concludes with the reminder that it is not enough to talk about our faith, but we must also walk in truth.

Transcript

If you have your Bible, turn with me please to the second epistle of John, and we'll read it together. But while you're turning, I'll share with you a few thoughts concerning this epistle that may be helpful in understanding its content. The author is, without controversy, John the Apostle, the disciple whom Jesus loves.

The date that this epistle was written seems to be around A.D. 90 or later. At least we know that it appears to have been written near the end of John's life. The place where this epistle was written is not known for sure, but all evidence seems to point to Ephesus.

The general subject is concerning love and truth. Someone has said that 2nd John speaks of the firmness of love and truth, and 3rd John speaks of the tenderness of love and truth. To me, this is quite sufficient.

If we can take literally that the lady to whom John was writing was an individual, and I think we can, it seems that she apparently was located somewhere in Asia Minor. Now, let's read this epistle together, shall we? The Elder unto the elect lady and her children whom I love in the truth, and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth, for the truth's sake which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us forever. Grace be with you, mercy and peace from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the

Father, in truth and love.

I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments.

This is the commandment that, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world who confess not that Jesus Christ is come into flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

Look to yourselves that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not gone. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God's speed. For he that biddeth him God's speed is partaker of his evil deeds. Having many things to write unto you I would not write with paper and ink, but I trust to come unto you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

Children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen. Now let us get to the task of examining each verse in this epistle and see what it may have for our very own personal lives, shall we? Verse 1 says, The elder unto the elect lady and her children.

The word elder here could refer to the fact that John is now retired and near the end of his life, or it could refer to his position at the time, or it could refer to both. We don't know for sure, but he goes on to say, unto the elect lady. It isn't necessary to know who this is, even though our curiosity would like to.

The things that we should concern ourselves with are the truths found in the letter that can be applied to us today. John continues by saying, unto the elect lady and her children. Some translations say her born ones, while our approach to this epistle is literal and consequently would take this statement to mean her actual children, the thought occurred to me that if we could spiritualize this a bit, we could assume that this elect, or Christian lady, had a good number of spiritual children.

In other words, she must have been a Christian who constantly witnessed for her Lord. I'm sure that each of us would be quick to agree that being a constant witness for Christ is no easy task, especially when in unpleasant circumstances. Nevertheless, in regards to seeking to improve ourselves, or as to witness for Christ, let me call your attention to Mark chapter 1 in verse 17, where Jesus Christ is calling Simon and Andrew to become his disciples.

He says, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. Could we say that if we're not following Christ, he cannot make us to become fishers of men? I think that just a little meditation on this will help us to see that the one thing we must do if we wish to be strong witnesses for Christ is to follow him. The responsibility of making us fishers of men is then his problem, not ours.

If we want to be winners, we must be followers. John continues, And not I only, but also all they that have known the truth. Dear friend, I want you to notice here that truth is the Christian's common denominator for fellowship.

The amount of fellowship we share with other Christians rests upon our mutual understanding of truth. The more truth we know, the more fellowship we have, and of course, the more the better. Verse 2 goes on to say, For the truth's sake.

This may be the character of the love John has for this lady, or it may be the reason for writing this letter, but the thing I want to point out is this. What is the truth? In John chapter 14 in verse 6, Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. In 1 John chapter 5 in verse 6, the apostle John writes, And it is the spirit that beareth witness, because the spirit is truth.

In John's gospel we read in chapter 17 and verse 17, Sanctify them through thy truth. Thy word is truth. I don't think we'd be too far wrong to say that all three are truth, the Lord, the Spirit, and the word.

Indeed, when you have one, you have all three, if you really have one. But regardless of what the truth may be specifically, the verse goes on to say, Which dwelleth in us and shall be with us forever. Interestingly enough, the Lord Jesus is in the child of God and shall be with him forever.

Also, the Holy Spirit is in the child of God and shall be with him forever. The word of God is very much inside the Christian and shall be with him forever. I suggest that you give yourself a little own-your-own Bible study course and look up these verses yourself.

Verse 3 continues, Grace be with you, mercy and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, and truth and love. Grace here is undeserved favor. Mercy is pity shown to the guilty.

Peace is a harmonious relationship with God, the result of his grace and mercy. The statement, be with you, tells us that all of the above are ours now. God the Father is the source of our blessings, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the channel through which we receive the blessings.

The statement, the Son of the Father, gives authority and character to the channel. The verse ends with these four words, in truth and love. In here is in the sense of through.

It could be translated, I think, through truth and love. In other words, when we acknowledge his truth and love, but not either one at the expense of the other, we become recipients of his grace, mercy, and peace. Of course, to reject God's truth and love is to write one's own consignment to the caverns of the damned.

Dear friend, if there's one thing that you must be absolutely sure of before you die, is that you have received Jesus Christ as your very own personal Savior and Lord. Verse four really begins the letter. Verses one through three are more or less an introduction.

John says, I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth. The word of is of in the sense of some. I think that John is saying that he rejoiced greatly when he found some of her children walking in truth.

We're reminded of three very important things here. First, even this elect lady didn't always have perfect success in teaching her born ones the ways of God. Some of them must have gone astray.

Yes, even the best leaders don't have perfect success. Why, even the Lord Jesus Christ didn't win everyone to whom he talked. I know in my own life I've been terribly disappointed when someone goes astray that we felt that we helped to accept Christ as Savior.

Well, at least I'm encouraged, but not glad that they had this problem even in New Testament days. The second thing we may learn here is that John's heart rejoiced when he learned of those who did walk in truth. Third John, verse four, reveals that the one thing that John loved more than anything else was to know that his children walked in truth, and this is always true concerning a genuine spiritual shepherd.

Dear friend, if you're a Christian, the greatest thing that you can do for the one who died on the cross for you and the one who led you to Christ is to walk in truth. A third thing that we need to be reminded of, however, is this. Notice that it says walk, not talk.

It's so easy for us to talk a good game. God help us to have the Bibles with shoe leather binding. Someone told a Christian once that what he did spoke so loud that he couldn't hear what he said.

God help us to talk right, and then back it up with the correct walk. John ends verse four by saying, as we have received a commandment from the Father. Most commentators point back to 1 John, chapter 3, and verse 24, which says, And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.

But it seems to me that the command to walk in truth goes back all the way to Adam in the Garden of Eden, where God told him not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis, chapter 2, and verse 17. This was just about the only sin that Adam could commit, disobedience, and of course later we learn that he did just that.

God's heart's cry to the human race has always been, walk in truth. Verse 5 gives us a test regarding our love. John says, And now I beseech thee, lady.

Notice that he says beseech. It's a plea, not a command. Only the commander-in-chief, the Lord Jesus Christ, can command, and he does this in his written word, the Bible.

But those of us who are Christians can only plead with others to obey his command. We cannot command others ourselves. I think most of us shall agree that the flesh usually demands its rights.

The spirit only pleads for right doing. This is a good lesson to have learned before dealing with others in the things of the Lord. Many local churches have been sorely divided simply because some Christian demanded that the rest of the body go his way.

Also, we do well to remember that the New Testament's greatest apostles besought. Peter did it in 2 Peter, chapter 2, and verse 11, and Paul did it in Romans, chapter 12, and verse 1, and John does it here. John continues, Not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

If at your leisure you look up Mark, chapter 12, verses 30 and 31, which was cited from Leviticus, chapter 19, and verse 18, you'll find that the command to love one another is placed right by the command to love God. Can we not gauge our love to God by how much we love the brethren? The effect of a right relationship with God is brotherly love. Dear friend, if you don't love your Christian brethren, don't go broadcasting how much you love God.

Verse 6 seems to more fully develop the thought of verse 5. It says, And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, that as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. The test of your love for God is, do you love your brethren, and do you really want to order your life according to God's word? If we're utter failures in our walk, some serious soul-searching should be in

order.

It may be that we've never really, really, really been born again. Someone has said that verses 7 can be classified as the test of doctrine. You'll recall that in verse 5 we saw the test of love, and in verse 6 we saw the test of obedience.

Verse 7 says, For many deceivers are entered into the world who confess not that Jesus Christ is come into flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. I want you to notice here that a deceiver and an antichrist is one who does not confess Christ.

It's not what you do, but what you do not do that makes you an antichrist. This same statement is made in 1 John chapter 4, verses 3 and 4. Satan seals the mouths of the unbelievers so they cannot confess Christ, but when one trusts Christ as Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit enters his life and breaks this chain that binds him, and gives him an unction to testify that Christ has saved him. Verse 8 continues this thought by saying, Look to yourselves.

In other words, take inventory and see where you stand. The words that we lose not those things which we have wrought deserve our most serious consideration. Those who study the Greek say that the we there should be translated ye, and the word wrought means gain, and he's saying take inventory and see to it that you lose not those things which ye have gained.

This interpretation gives us a little different approach to the real meaning of the verse. Could it be that John is telling them to check up and see if they have really been born again? You know, there is a certain type of faith that doesn't really save us. It's one thing to believe about something, but it's another matter entirely to believe unto action, where we make an all-out permanent commitment of our soul's salvation to the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Three references to a faith that doesn't save are Matthew chapter 13 and verse 19, 1st Corinthians chapter 15 verses 1 through 4, and James chapter 2 and verse 19. However, it is my personal feeling that the words lose not give us the key to the real meaning of this verse. We know that we cannot lose our salvation.

Furthermore, to lose something indicates that we at one time had it, so it apparently doesn't refer to our being saved. I think that it refers to a well done from the Lord Jesus at the judgment seat of Christ. In 2nd Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 10, we have these words, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

I believe that John is saying here in verse 8, take inventory and make sure that you do not let your life deteriorate into a powerless useless existence far below what God has planned for you. The closing words of the verse, but that you receive a full reward, seems to support this interpretation. Verse 9 is another verse that deserves our most serious consideration.

The word transgressor means to go beyond. The thought is that whosoever goes beyond and does not abide, that is, settle down and rest upon the fact that Christ came, hath not gone. That is, they're not really saved, but he that stands secure upon the fact that Christ did come and teach certain doctrines, this person is surely saved.

Some teach that an interesting progression is found in verses 9 and 10. The first time the words doctrine of Christ are used in verse 9, they refer to the fact that Christ did come. The second time these words are used in verse 9, they refer to all that Christ taught when he came.

Translators say that the words of Christ, when used the second time, are not in the oldest manuscripts. In verse 10, the words this doctrine refer to the doctrines that the apostles taught, which for us today mean the entire written revelation of God's word. Verse 10 tells us that if anyone comes to our door and brings not this doctrine, we're not to invite them into our house, neither are we to say goodbye to them.

If we do, we're becoming an accessory to the fact as far as God is concerned we learn in verse 11. Let me say that most all of us have had some teacher from a false cult come to our door trying to sell us some kind of book to more fully explain the Bible. Interestingly enough, each of the cults have some extra book to add new light to the Bible, they say.

In every case, however, I think you'll find that it adds to, takes from, or changes the true message of God's holy word. The question is to consider all of these books to be satanic in character, and is to reject them and their propagators promptly. I do not believe, however, that verse 10 denies the Christian the right to have a lost person in his home for a meal or refreshment, especially when the Christian is indirectly seeking to lead the lost person to Christ.

One other thought on verse 10. I do not believe that this verse teaches that a Christian should reject another Christian if they do not agree eye to eye on every single thing in the Bible. This is pushing the spirit of the verse too far, I feel.

On the other hand, a good counter balance for the child of God is to seek every way possible to live his life within the framework of the word of God. If the Bible is silent on a matter, the Christian should be silent. If the Bible speaks, then the only thing that really matters is what does it say? This, then, is what the Christian should say.

The Christian should follow the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. A few verses that may encourage this line of thought are Psalms 119, verse 10 and verse 30, Isaiah chapter 8 in verse 2, 2 Timothy chapter 3, verses 16 and 17, 2 Peter chapter 1 in verse 3, and 3 John verse 12. In verse 12 of this letter, however, John, in effect, is saying, I have a lot more to say, but I'll not write it out, because I hope to see you soon, and when I do, we'll both have a joyous time.

We might comment here that it's always good when joy is the result of two Christians' fellowship together. Let us be spreaders of joy among our brethren, not disciples of division. In verse 13, John concludes his letter on an encouraging note.

He says, the children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen. It seems to me that the elect lady to whom John had written had a sister residing where John was when he wrote this letter.

The words, elect sister, would indicate that the sister may have been a Christian, too. She also had children, and her children sent their greetings. Some who teach that the two sisters here represent two assemblies, and the children represent the Christians of the two assemblies, believe that this verse tells us that the Christians in one locality sent their greetings to the Christians in the other locality through this letter.

If this is true, it is a warm verse indicating the love that existed between the two churches. As we come to the end of this study of 2 John, may the Holy Spirit of God remind us and strengthen us to, number one, determine that our fellowship with others shall be based strictly upon the truth, the word of God. Number two, live our lives within the framework of the word of God, as the Lord enables.

And, number three, reject all false teachers and teachings who add to, subtract from, or change the wonderful word of God. Shall we pray? Our Father, we pray that whatever has been of ourselves in this study shall be speedily forgotten, but whatever is of thyself shall remain in our hearts and bear fruit for all eternity. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

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