Ministry Meeting

2 John -- 3 John -- Ezra 3 -- 1 Chronicles 25

April 5, 2009

Opening Reading -- 2 John 1-13

2 John 1-13

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 for ever. 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 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. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. 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 speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Love and Truth: Fully Compatible

The second epistle of John opens with love and truth together, and there is no tension between them. When you hear it said that truth and love are opposed -- that the claims of truth must be softened for the sake of love -- it is certain that

either some error has been mixed in with the truth, or something is wrong with the love being described, or perhaps both. John writes to one whom he loves in the truth. That is not a fleshly affection. When God so loved the world, He did not set aside the fact that He is light. Not one thing that was due to the God who is light was swept aside or ignored because of His love. Instead, He sent His dear Son to bear the punishment for sin, so that love and righteousness were both fully satisfied at the cross.

The elect lady was chosen -- not by a democratic process, but by God. And John's love for her was love in the truth. This stands as a model: that is the character true Christian affection ought to have toward all the Lord's people. It is not a sentiment that says, 'just love me -- do not read me any verses, do not tell me what is due to Christ, just love me.' That is not the kind of love John had.

The Same Words to a Sister and a Brother

The third epistle opens: 'The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.' The second epistle was written to a sister. The third to a brother. And to both of them, word for word, John says: 'whom I love in the truth.' He was not awkward in writing to a sister, wondering how to phrase his affection. He was not writing something specially warm to the brother so he would know it was genuine. The same words to both. Because the love in the truth is the same for all the Lord's people. If we extrapolate from the limited evidence available, it is true of all of them: we are all loved in the truth, because we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Walking in Truth: The Substance of Christian Life

The second section of 2 John (verses 4-6) and the corresponding section of 3 John (verses 2-4) share the same theme: joy over those who walk in truth. John rejoiced greatly when he found the children of the elect lady walking in truth. He

says to Gaius: 'I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.' In one epistle it is a sister's children; in the other it is a brother. The joy is the same.

Verse 6 of 2 John gives us the definition: 'This is love, that we walk after his commandments.' Love is not primarily a feeling but a direction. It's not a matter of keeping up with the latest themes that are current in Christian circles. It is that 'as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.' The obedience to the Lord Jesus that flows from a love responding to His word in our consciences -- that is the Christian walk. Love and truth together produce it.

Fellowship: The Doctrine of Christ as the Test

> **2 John 9-11**
> *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. 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 speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*

The test stated in verse 10 is worth noticing carefully. It is not: if there come any unto you and bring an evil doctrine, or bring the opposite of this doctrine, or bring something that does not sound right. The way it is written is: 'If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine.' It is a positive test. Does the one who comes bring the doctrine of Christ? If yes, fellowship is possible. If not, then not -- and the prohibition is thorough: not into the house, not even a greeting of Godspeed. Such a greeting would make the one who gives it a partaker of the evil deeds of the one who does not bring the doctrine of Christ.

Diotrephes: The Same Question Turned Around

In 3 John the fellowship question appears from the opposite direction. In 2 John the danger was receiving those who did not bring the doctrine of Christ. In 3 John the danger was refusing to receive those who did bring it. Diotrephes would not receive the apostles. He would not receive the brethren. And if anyone else received the brethren, Diotrephes cast them out of the assembly.

The brethren were called brethren precisely because they brought the doctrine of Christ, because they loved in the truth, because they walked in the love that is consistent with truth. And these are the ones Diotrephes refused. Why? Because he loved to have the preeminence. That is stated plainly in verse 9. The desire for personal preeminence -- the setting of self above the presence and authority of the Lord Jesus in the midst of His assembly -- is at the root of every Diotrephes-like spirit. It sets aside the headship of Christ by substituting the preeminence of a man.

The Apostle John did not write letters of excommunication from a distance. He said: 'If I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth.' If the apostle came, the Lord Jesus would be there in the midst of His assembly, and the matter would be set right -- according to love in the truth and the walk of obedience consistent with both.

Both Epistles End the Same Way

Both 2 John and 3 John end with nearly identical words: I would not write with paper and ink (or pen and ink), but I hope to come and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. That is what love in the truth does: it looks forward to seeing face to face. We have many dear brethren who are members of the body of Christ -- truly the Lord's people -- whom we may look forward to seeing face to face at the coming of the Lord Jesus. For we shall see the Lord Himself when He comes, and we shall be gathered together unto Him. Maranatha. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Ezra 3: Gathered as One Man -- The Burnt Offering Restored

> **Ezra 3:1-4, 10-13**
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> *And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God... And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of Jehovah, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise Jehovah, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto Jehovah; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel: and all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised Jehovah, because the foundation of the house of Jehovah was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice... so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping.*

Here is a little remnant returning from captivity in Babylon and gathering as one man to Jerusalem. The gatherings as one man tells us something: there had to have been real affection among them to produce that unity. They were not at odds. And they walked according to the truth they had, for they offered burnt offerings as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. Not as seemed good to them, not in any way they devised, but as it was written.

The burnt offering appears six times in this passage. What does it speak of? The acceptability of Christ to God. The burnt offering was entirely Godward -- even if not one soul were ever saved, Christ's sacrifice on the cross was completely and perfectly acceptable to God because it honored and glorified Him and

justified Him in every claim of His righteousness. Thankfully, it has also redeemed our souls. But it is the acceptability of Christ to God that stands first. Is that not a picture of the doctrine of Christ? If something does not honor Christ, if it is not of the character of what is acceptable to God in Him, God cannot honor it.

Singing in the Midst of Ruin

These people were in the midst of ruins. There were only a few of them. The ten tribes were scattered far and wide and would be until the coming day. The temple had been destroyed. The land had been desolate. And yet they were singing and praising. A brother once remarked: we do not sing to make ourselves happy -- we sing because we are happy. The reason for their singing is given: they had offered the burnt offering, and then the foundation of the temple was laid. The acceptability of Christ to God, and the establishing of the house -- those are grounds enough for singing, however dark the surroundings.

But in the midst of this joy there was also weeping. Those who had seen the first house wept when this foundation was laid. Perhaps they were remembering the sin and sorrow that had caused the destruction of the first temple, the scattering of so many, the desolation of the land. Joy and sorrow together, so that the noise of the shouting could not be distinguished from the noise of the weeping. Is that not true of our own hearts? The joy of what the Lord is building, and the sorrow of knowing how far things have fallen from what they once were.

They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles -- a feast that had not been kept since the days of Joshua, not even in the days of David and Solomon and Hezekiah. The Feast of Tabernacles looks on to the millennial day when the Lord Jesus will have His rightful place and will reign. This little feeble remnant was able to take up what the greatest kings of Israel had not maintained. In the midst of ruin, they held fast to the burnt offering, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the singing of praise.

Doesn't that remind us of 2 John and 3 John?

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1 Chronicles 25: Under the Hands of Their Father for Song

> **1 Chronicles 25:5-6**
> *All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer in the words of God, to lift up the horn. And God gave to Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. All these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of Jehovah, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God.*

Here, in the day of David's glory, not in a day of ruin, there were those who were given especially for song in the house of the Lord. Heman had fourteen sons and three daughters, and all of them were under the hands of their father for song. What a beautiful expression: 'under the hands of their father for song in the house of the Lord.' Subject to their father, together, for the purpose of worship and praise to God.

The elect lady's children walking in truth, Gaius and the brethren of 3 John, the returning remnant of Ezra 3, the sons of Heman under their father's hands for song -- all of these together speak of the same thing: the Lord's people, young and old, gathered in love and truth, honoring what is honoring to God, and singing His praise. May the Lord give us grace to have these things lay hold of our consciences and hearts, that we might walk in the good of them and be found praising and worshipping the Lord -- not merely in the assembly, but first of all in our individual lives.

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Lord willing.