

## 12. John's Letter to the Chosen Lady (3Q 2009—Loved and Loving: John's Epistles)

**Biblical material:** Exod. 20:1–17; Rom. 6:17; 2 Thess. 2:10; Heb. 13:2; 2 John; Rev. 2:14, 15; 14:12.

### Quotes

- Those who know the truth are not equal to those who love it. *Confucius*
- Whenever you have truth it must be given with love, or the message and the messenger will be rejected. *Ghandi*
- I wonder if you ever change human beings with arguments alone: either by peppering them with sharp facts or by blowing them up with great guns of truth. You scare them, but do you change them? I wonder if you ever make any real difference in human beings without understanding them and loving them. For when you argue with a man (how much more with a woman) you are somehow trying to pull him down and make him less (and yourself more); but when you try to understand him, when you like him, how eager is he then to know the truth you have?... There is nothing in the world that people so much thrive upon, grow fine and rosy and robust upon... as being loved. *David Grayson*

### Questions

How do we love in truth, and tell the truth in love? How can we command love—and is this what God does? Can we really lose what we've worked for—and what does this mean? Why is it so important to focus on God's principles of government? How do we identify "the true church"?

### Bible discussion

"Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for" (2 John 8 NIV). Having come so far in the Christian life, how foolish it would be to give up and lose out now! To think like this is not because we are thinking of the reward, rather we want to continue through to the end so we can be forever with our God of truth and love.

The keywords of this brief epistle are truth and love. These essential terms are both repeated six times in the space of these few lines. John emphasizes the primary concepts that dominate both his first letter and his gospel. Truth without love is cold and formal, right without being winsome. Love without truth is misguided and dishonest, affectionate without being legitimate.

By identifying God as a being of both truth and love, John captures the essence of the way God operates and the response God wishes from each of us. In substance the principles of God and His government rest on these two great pillars, rightly understood. This harmony of truth and love is truly divine and has definite results in the Christian's life.

John talks about a new command. But is it? Jesus himself also identified a new command (John 13:34). But though it may have seemed new to his hearers at the time, as John came to understand, this is not a new command, since it reflects the character of God since the very beginning. As he wrote in the previous letter, "This command I am writing you is not new; it is the old command, the one you have had from the beginning. The old command is the message you have already heard. However, the command I now write you

is new, because its truth is seen in Christ and also in you.” (1 John 2:7, 8 TEV). God’s command becomes new in the person of Jesus Christ—in him it is most clearly revealed. And remember that this command was at the heart of Jesus’ message too.

Since Jesus stresses the “love command,” it’s clear that God never compels or pressurizes any of His children to obey Him. Indeed, to operate from such principles of force and compulsion would be to negate the whole Great Controversy and its evidence, accumulated at such tremendous cost. For if God can achieve His intentions by force, why does He not do so? Why did He not do so in the very beginning?

“Anyone who does not stay with the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God” (2 John 9 TEV). Christ is not contradictory—so anything someone might have to say must be tested by what has already been revealed. While it may seem impressive—a popular TV evangelist may say that he is communicating “God’s word” directly and “on-air”—but this can be no substitute for the study of the Bible.

“I have a lot that I could write to you, but somehow I find it hard to put down on paper. I hope to come and see you personally, and we will have a heart-to-heart talk together—and how we shall enjoy that!” (2 John 12 Phillips). Here we can see John’s great love that comes straight from the heart. Separated by distance his heart goes out to his brothers and sisters in the truth whom he genuinely loves and cares for. What a tremendous example to us, for whatever the theological ideals, Christianity is shown for what it is as it’s played out in the lives of individual believers.

John in his Epistle says that his greatest happiness is to be with his extended Christian family. He writes from genuine “parental” concern for those he loves in the truth, and he wishes more than anything else to be with them. He expresses a real and deeply-felt love for these members of the church.

### **Ellen White Comments**

If the divine harmony of truth and love exists in the heart, it will shine forth in words and actions.... The spirit of genuine benevolence must dwell in the heart. Love imparts to its possessor grace, propriety, and comeliness of deportment. Love illuminates the countenance and subdues the voice; it refines and elevates the entire man. It brings him into harmony with God, for it is a heavenly attribute. {AH 426}

God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble to the earth; but He did not do this. Rebellion was not to be overcome by force. Compelling power is found only under Satan’s government. The Lord’s principles are not of this order. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God’s government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power. {DA 759}

Christ refuses every other method,—everything like compulsion, or restriction, or force. His only weapons are truth and love. “I, if I be lifted up from the earth,” he says, “will draw all men unto me.” Fallen humanity is drawn, not forced, into any position. {RH, June 28, 1898}

The Saviour desires His Church to be governed by the principles of love and truth. Love for one another reveals that the love of God is abiding in the heart. But many who profess to be followers of Christ are so filled with a sense of their own importance that they have no room in the heart for the sweet peace of Christ... Their hearts, once full of love for God and their brethren, are frozen by selfishness. {RH, August 6, 1901}

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