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TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

2 John

1-13

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- Over the next two weeks, we're going to do the unthinkable for a VBVM study
 - We're going to study two books of the Bible, 2 John & 3 John, one each night
 - Both books have the same author, the Apostle John
 - Both are among the shorter works of the canon
 - You may be wondering do we need to study 1 John before studying 2 John & 3 John...are they dependent upon one another?
 - We see Paul's letters named by the audiences he addressed in each letter
 - Rome, Corinth, Galatia, etc.
 - But John's letters carry only numbers, so perhaps this implies an ordering of the material?
 - The answer, of course, is no
 - John's letters are no more dependent on one another than were Paul's or Peter's
 - John (like Peter) wrote several letters without identifying a specific church or region as his audience
 - So we number their letters to distinguish them
 - But those numbers don't imply successive thought
 - So 2 John and 3 John are not dependent on 1 John
 - On the other hand, there are striking similarities among all John's letters
 - He raises similar themes and uses similar phrasing
 - He had similar concerns about false teachers
 - And in all three letters, he consistently emphasizes the need to walk in the knowledge of what we had been given in Christ
- Tonight we study 2 John
 - Anytime we start a new book, we want to take a little time upfront to understand the context in which it was written
 - The apostle John is the author
 - Even though he doesn't name himself in the letter, his authorship was never in question in the early church and few have ever challenged it
 - Even a cursory comparison to 1 John or 3 John immediately reveals the similar language and style of writing
 - John likely wrote the letter while in Ephesus, to a church in Asia Minor, near the end of his life around AD 90-95
 - The key concern John addresses in all three of his letters is the importance in living according to the true doctrines of the faith
 - And to resist the false teaching of those trying to undermine the truth
 - In the late first century, Gnosticism was the movement gaining the most ground in the church
 - So as the last living apostle, it fell to John to stand up to this heresy

- That’s why his three letters read so similarly
- He is urgently concerned with the movement of this false teaching in the early church and how to stem the tide
- We’ll talk more about Gnosticism and its beliefs in the course of tonight’s study
- Let’s begin with the first two verses

2John 1 The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth,

2John 2 for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:

- John never names the church that received this letter
 - Interestingly, he addressed the letter to a chosen lady and her children
 - Many have wondered who this lady is, since she is not named in the letter
 - The clue to understanding what John means is found in the last verse of the letter

2John 13 The children of your chosen sister greet you.

- As John finishes the letter, he says that the “children” of the chosen “sister” of this “lady” greets you
 - As we read between the lines we see John uses the term “lady” as a euphemism for a church
 - Just as the Church is personified in scripture as a “bride” for Christ, John is calling the local church a “lady”
 - And therefore, the children of that lady are the believers in that particular church
 - Notice John calls the lady “chosen” reflecting the name of the church
 - In Greek the word for chosen is *eklektos*
 - While the Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, which means the chosen guests
 - The word “chosen” reflects God’s election of the believer into faith
 - We were chosen before the foundations of the Earth, Paul explained in Ephesians
- So John is addressing a church body, who he calls the chosen lady, and the believers in that church are the “children” of that church
 - And then at the end of the letter, he tells his recipients that the children of a sister church greet them
 - That sister church was likely John’s church in Ephesus
- Why is John speaking in such terms rather than in naming the churches specifically?
 - The likely reason is to avoid persecution should his letter fall into the wrong hands
 - These days are days of Christian persecution in the Roman empire

- So by avoiding naming the specific locations of the churches (or even calling them churches), John is protecting himself and his audience
- This may also explain why John doesn't identify himself by name; to protect his own identity
- John says that he loves this church body in truth
 - Not only does John love this church, but all who know the truth love them
 - What truth is John speaking about?
 - The truth of Jesus as Messiah
 - The truth of the Gospel He delivered
 - In short, the testimony of God's word concerning Christ
 - So John says he loves the church in the Gospel of Christ
 - And all those who know this same truth love them as well
 - This is a powerful statement we shouldn't take for granted
 - The word love gets tossed around a lot in our culture and in our time
 - But the biblical concept is very specific and very important
 - John is saying that by their shared faith they have been made part of a new family
 - And that shared faith draws men and women together by a spiritual love that is not natural...it's supernatural
 - In natural terms, people express love to one another for any number of reasons
 - We understand a love of a parent for a child
 - Or the love of siblings
 - Or the love of romance
 - Or lesser forms of love for a pet, for a car, for a sports team etc.
 - None of those loves are "in truth", however
 - They don't exist as a matter of truth
 - In fact, their existence is subject to changing emotions, changing circumstances
 - Marriages end, siblings fight, parents abuse children and children abuse parents
 - We may lose interest in pets, cars breakdown, favorite teams come and go
 - The point is these are not relationships based in an unshakable truth
- But the love John has for the children of God is based in truth
 - That truth is a Person, and His Spirit indwells us all, making us one in love
 - We may not like every Christian we meet
 - But if we are being led by the Spirit, we can still experience a supernatural love for every brother and sister
 - That love originates from the Spirit Who teaches us what self-sacrificial love looks like

- This is the reason why Jesus said things like this:

Matt. 12:47 Someone said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.”

Matt. 12:48 But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?”

Matt. 12:49 And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers!

Matt. 12:50 “For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”

- Or this provocative statement:

Mark 10:29 Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake,

Mark 10:30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

- In His teaching, Jesus is drawing upon this same principle of love in truth
 - The love Christians can experience for one another is based on the love of God in us by His Spirit
 - By that Spirit, we come to know each other as a new family
 - And that new family is bound together by a love that is even stronger than the earthly bonds we know
 - We may love our mothers and fathers and siblings, and pets and possessions
 - But we can never love them with the same degree and steadfastness that we will love the family of God
 - Because in eternity, the family of God will be our eternal family
- Next John says this truth is something that abides in us and will be with us forever
 - One of John’s most popular words is abide
 - In Greek it’s the word *meno*, which means to stay or remain
 - There is a love present among the believers made possible by the truth of the Gospel
 - Having the knowledge of the truth and the indwelling of the Spirit is the common characteristic uniting all believers
 - And both that truth and the Spirit remain with all believers forever
 - Here we find a simple proof of the eternal security of the believer
 - The truth (i.e., the Spirit and our faith in the Gospel) will be with us forever
 - The only way John’s promise can be true is if our salvation is permanent

- Next John extends his greeting to the church

2John 3 Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

- John expresses grace, mercy and peace for all believers
 - These words are pillars of Christianity resting on a foundation of Christ
 - John says these things come from the Father by way of the Son, in truth and love
 - Together, they describe the path of reconciliation that brings us to God
 - Notice the ordering of the words...first comes grace
 - Grace is the unmerited favor of God that brings us to repentance
 - Grace describes God's work of drawing us into a relationship with Christ and giving us the gift of faith
 - Second comes mercy
 - God's grace brings us God's mercy
 - Mercy is compassion for the weak and needy
 - Through our faith in the atoning work of Christ's blood, God may be just in having mercy on us for our sin
 - Finally, God's mercy brings us peace
 - Peace is the realization of harmony with God and the relief from God's wrath for our sin
 - We obtain true, lasting, eternal peace with God by His mercy as a result of God's grace
 - These three qualities of the Christian experience are unique to the Gospel
 - Only the true Gospel comes by the grace of God; false gospels demand works
 - Only the true Gospel offers the assurance of mercy; false gospels say we must do penance or compensate God in some way to avoid His wrath
 - Only the true Gospel brings lasting peace; false gospels give no assurance of Heaven, resulting in worry and doubt about what death brings
- Now we reach the heart of this short letter
 - In v.4 John sets the tone for what follows

2John 4 I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father.

- John, speaking in the past tense, says he was pleased to find some of the believers in this church walking in truth
 - Apparently, John had met with some members of this church at an earlier point in Ephesus

- During that earlier meeting, John had been pleased to learn that some were walking in the truth
 - This statement is damning with faint praise
 - What John means is I heard that some were walking in the truth, but not all were doing so
 - Some were not walking in the truth
 - What does John mean when he says to walk in the truth?
 - John uses metaphors and pictures more than any other NT author
 - For example, virtually each chapter in John’s Gospel is centered around a metaphor like birth, blindness, water, bread, vines, etc.
 - He uses metaphors to represent spiritual truth concerning Jesus
 - And in his letters he relies heavily on metaphors like light, darkness, day, night, walking, etc.
 - Here he says some are walking in the truth
 - Walking is a metaphor for the life we experience in faith
 - It does not mean simply having faith or even being willing to make that faith known (i.e., testifying of your faith)
 - It means living in obedience to the teaching of Christ
 - So truth is a reference to the true teaching of Christ through His apostles
 - The doctrines and precepts of the faith
 - Therefore, walking in the truth means living a life under the guidance and authority of God’s word
- John is commending some in the church for living according to the truth they received, while correcting others for failing to do so
 - Some were allowing the truth to guide their thinking and behavior
 - When they wondered how they could please God in certain circumstances, they turned to Christ’s teaching and the teaching of the apostles for the answers
 - Simply put, they were obedient to the word of God, which they received from the apostles
 - Then there were some who had received the same truth, but they weren’t allowing it to guide their walk
 - The word of God wasn’t a lamp to the feet, so they strayed off the path prescribed by the apostles’ teaching
 - They were living in the flesh, and they were likely falling for false teaching as well
 - Every church body knows this same situation
 - Every group of believers will have some who are sincerely working to confirm their life to the expectations of God’s word
 - While other Christians do not
 - This is a dirty little secret of church life

- We all share the same faith and therefore the same identity
- We come together regularly, greet each other warmly, treat each other as equals in the body, looking forward to our eternity in the Kingdom
- Yet we know we are not all equally pleasing to the Lord
- Some of our brothers and sister are living with less of a commitment to doing what Christ commands
- The letters of the NT are all directed in one way or another to this fundamental issue: Christians should live according to the word of God
 - We must walk in the truth
- And when see specific situations where this is true, we need to speak correction in love to those who aren't making walking in truth a priority
- If there were any doubt that we are supposed to make obedience a priority, John reminds the church that obedience to God's word is not optional
 - The Father has commanded from the beginning that men observe His word
 - The first such instruction came in the Garden
 - And that instruction has never changed
 - Those who obey God's word are blessed eternally
 - Those who fail to obey God's word suffer loss, one way or another
 - It should concern us greatly if we are not living obediently to the word of God
 - We should be preoccupied, consumed by our disobedience wherever it exists
 - A sinful walk should be cause for great concern and great motivation to make the necessary changes in our life
 - Some might counter that no Christian lives a perfect life, but so what?
 - Just because we can't eliminate sin entirely doesn't mean we shouldn't strive for greater obedience
 - Even though men will never find a perfect diamond, it doesn't stop them from digging
 - Even though you will never be sinless this side of Heaven, that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to sin less
 - We are commanded to try by studying the word and then doing what it says
- Now John moves to one of his most common, and powerful, themes in all three of his letters

2John 5 Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.

2John 6 And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.

- Once again, talking to the church, John says the church must love one another

- John connects obedience to the word of God with fellowship in the church
 - The fellowship of Christian love is a manifestation of obedience to God’s word
 - When everyone in the body of Christ is walking in obedience to the Lord, then that body will, by necessity, be walking in unison
 - And in that unity comes love for one another
 - Then truly the Body of Christ is one
- This is not something new in God’s plan
 - God has always demanded that His people live according to His word
 - And that when we do so, we will experience love for one another
 - Jesus echoes this teaching when He was asked to give the most important law

Matt. 22:36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”

Matt. 22:37 And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’

Matt. 22:38 “This is the great and foremost commandment.

Matt. 22:39 “The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’

Matt. 22:40 “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

- God’s highest priority for men has always been our complete obedience to God
 - Notice that Jesus equates complete obedience to God with love for God
 - In scripture, love is a verb, not a noun
 - Love isn’t something we feel for God; love is something we demonstrate to God through obedience
- Secondly, having become obedient to God, then we may love our neighbor
 - We can’t come to a complete and true love for our neighbor until we have reached the point of obedience to God
 - Because if we are living in rebellion to God in any part of our life, we won’t be 100% loving to others
 - For example, if we are disobedient to God’s word by gossiping, lying, cheating, hating, withholding charity, judging others...
 - In each of those cases, we are automatically not loving our neighbor
- So John emphasizes that we must walk in truth, which is the commandment to obey God’s word
 - So that by doing this, we may love one another in the church
 - And the Lord has been preaching this requirement from the beginning
- Why does John continue to emphasize “the beginning”?
 - Because the church was under assault from false teachers claiming to have new information

- They were mimicking the pattern of the apostles, pretending to be men of equal authority
 - This pattern began even while Paul and the other apostles were still alive and teaching
 - But now that only John was left, the false teachers were actively working to take the place of the apostles
 - They introduced false doctrines of one kind or another
 - And they explained the novelty of their views by claiming they brought hidden wisdom, something unknown until now
 - One particularly powerful threat came from the Gnostics
 - They taught several heresies
 - First, they taught that knowledge of God was more important than living obediently to God's word
 - This reminds us of Jude's teaching
 - Jude said the false teachers of the day were teaching lies to give opportunity to engage in immoral behavior
 - The Gnostics commonly engaged in immoral behavior under the pretense that their superior knowledge of God sanctified them from sin
- Secondly, they held that a nonliteral interpretation of scripture was required (i.e., a mystical view of scripture's meaning)
 - Only a few could attain to that understanding
 - As with Jude again, false teachers of this sort are unbelievers
 - So we know they didn't understand the scriptures in an honest way, for they lacked the Spirit
 - Therefore, they had to invent their own meanings for the words they read
 - Then they spun a story that only they could see the truth properly
 - If this sounds familiar, it's because this is exactly the storyline of the fable of the Emperor's New Clothes
 - It's a spiritual con game
 - Finally, they held other heretical views like denying the incarnation of Christ, and denying there is a resurrection
 - Gnosticism was a cult of false teaching masquerading as Christianity
 - We have our own versions of these false Christian movements today: Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and even Catholicism
- This is why John is so insistent that everything the Christian needed to please God and experience love in truth, had been already delivered from the beginning
 - He is emphasizing that the late arrival of these teachers is itself a sign they are illegitimate and not from God
 - More importantly, their teaching contradicts the Lord's teaching and the apostles' teaching
 - So John admonishes the church to remain in the truth, to walk in that truth, to

rely on what was delivered in the beginning

- Next, like Jude, John highlights the key errors of the false teachers and their evil origins

2John 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.

- Many deceivers are in the world
 - The world is filled with many liars
 - John defines the liar by a specific criteria
 - They are men and women who have denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh
 - This was one of the key heresies of the Gnostics in Jesus' day
 - The Gnostics held that deity could not be united with flesh because it was beneath deity to associate with the material
 - They explained Jesus ministry as that of a mere man through whom God worked
 - So they denied the incarnation of Jesus Christ
 - We may not have the Gnostics in name today, but this heresy is still alive and well in many places
 - The Mormons do not believe in the incarnation as the Bible teaches it
 - The Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe Jesus was God incarnate
 - Many unbelievers credit Jesus for being an influential world figure, but they deny He was God in the flesh
 - John is calling all of them liars
 - This will forever remain the central disagreement between those who believe and those who are liars
 - Whatever concessions unbelievers are willing to make toward Jesus, few would agree that Jesus was literally God in human form
 - For if they agree to this principle, then they must give credit to all that Jesus said
- John says they have “gone out”
 - This phrase in Greek implies they were sent from a common origin
 - Like an army following the orders of a commanding general on a battle field, they have gone out
 - Though they might not realize they are working for a common boss, John indicates they are nonetheless
 - And John names that commanding general
 - He says “this” is the deceiver and antichrist
 - Notice John uses singular terms at the end of v.7

- He started with a plural thought (many) but ends with a singular reference
- The many were those unbelievers and liars who deny the truth of God taking the form of man, so who is the singular?
- He is the deceiver and antichrist, John says
 - John is the only NT writer to use the term antichrist
 - He uses it here and in 1 John, for example

1John 4:3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

- John says that every spirit who does not agree that Jesus is from God is operating in the spirit of the antichrist
 - In the case of the first spirit, John is describing the spiritual nature of a person
 - He is saying every person who rejects the truth of the Gospel is demonstrating a spirit under the influence and authority of another spirit
 - That second spirit is the spirit of the antichrist
 - We know the Antichrist refers to a man who comes in the very last days of God's Tribulation on earth
 - He is called by many names in scripture
 - Paul calls him the man of lawlessness
 - Daniel and Ezekiel call him the prince
 - John names him as the antichrist
 - But then John also describes a spirit of the antichrist
 - This spirit is the spiritual power behind the man
 - Notice in 1 John 4:3 John says the antichrist is coming (future tense) and is already in the world
 - He's referring to both the man and the spiritual force behind the man
 - The man is coming in the future, the one who will seize world power in the last days
 - But the spirit behind him is even now operating in the world
 - That spirit of the antichrist is Satan
 - So John ends this verse by saying "this" is the deceiver and antichrist
 - Meaning, this is a work of the deceiver and the spirit of the antichrist, that is Satan
 - Satan is the commanding general sending out liars into the world to oppose the Gospel
- As the letter draws to a close, John begins to give specific instructions to the church

2John 8 Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished,

but that you may receive a full reward.

2John 9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

- John says to the church watch yourselves
 - The word watch means to guard and protect
 - The church is to guard and protect each other against these false teachings
 - The guarding is a collective effort, because there is safety in numbers
 - Like sheep huddled together so the wolf can't pick off a stray
 - If we don't guard each other in this way, John says some might lose their reward
 - The accomplishment John references is the accomplishments of our service to Christ in faith
 - As Paul describes in 1 Cor 3, believers will be judged by Christ for the quality of our work in serving Him
 - That judgment will lead to a measure of reward for each us according to our service
 - John's warning adds an important element to our understanding of 1 Cor 3
 - It's not an all or none judgment
 - We might see our rewards discounted for our errors or faithlessness at some level
 - Theoretically, if we earned a certain amount of reward in the first 20 years of walking with Christ, and then we go astray for the final 10 years of our life on earth, then we might lose 50% of our reward
 - So we see a system of puts and takes in God's economy of reward, and John is concerned we would receive our full reward
- What might cause us to lose reward? What are we guarding against in this case?
 - John says in v.9 that it's possible for a Christian to go "too far"
 - That word in Greek literally means to go ahead, as in to run ahead of someone leaving them behind
 - John warns that it's possible for a Christian to leave Christ behind, in the sense of not abiding in the teaching of Christ
 - Remember, abiding means to stay or remain close
 - It's the opposite of going ahead too far
 - So those who remain under the counsel and authority of the word are in a position to please the Lord and receive a full reward
 - Those who run away from Jesus are potentially forfeiting reward
 - Also, they do not have God
 - Is John saying they are unbelievers?
 - No, because unbelievers never had a chance at reward in the first place

- It must be believers in view
 - Well, is John suggesting they are no longer saved?
 - No, because scripture is clear that salvation is a permanent work of God
 - Earlier in the letter we saw that reaffirmed by John
- So what does it mean for a believer to not have God?
 - When a believer runs away from the word of God and lives a life outside the authority of scripture, they are living without God in their life
 - The Spirit of God is still living inside them, and they are still redeemed by the blood of Christ
 - But in terms of their experience, in terms of their walk in faith, they are walking without God
 - The word for have in Greek (*echo*) can also mean accompanying or experiencing
 - The believer is not experiencing the life they could because they have run away from God's company
 - But even when we are faithless, He remains faithful to us, because He cannot deny Himself
- But when we abide/remain with God in our walk, we have the fellowship of both the Father and the Son
 - In other words we have not only the Father, by virtue of the Spirit of God
 - This is something all Christians possess, even those who run ahead
 - But when we abide, we also enjoy the benefit Christ in our life; that is the word of God working in our life
- Then John gives a final piece of advice to the church concerning the false teachers

2John 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting;

2John 11 for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

- John makes his teaching on this point a litmus test for the church
 - If anyone comes to the church as a teacher but is unwilling to agree that Jesus is the Christ in the flesh, then the church must deal harshly with such a person
 - We cannot receive them into our house
 - The reference to house is somewhat cultural in this case
 - In that day, church activities were largely conducted in homes
 - And traveling teachers were usually accommodated in the homes of those they taught in the church
 - So the issue here isn't merely one of hospitality
 - John is essentially prohibiting the church from opening its doors to allow false teachers to operate within the body

- That is also the meaning of a greeting
- A greeting meant to welcome the person into the assembly
- To acknowledge them as Christian and as a brother in the Lord
- If they do not agree that Jesus is God incarnate, John says do not acknowledge them as Christian nor welcome them into the assembly
- Sometimes we make the mistake of trying to win someone over to Christ by giving them more credit than they are due
 - So we allow them to join with us as supposed Christians when we know they hold to false doctrines that deny Jesus as Lord
 - We cannot do this because it places a priority on the wrong things
 - We are favoring the needs of one over the needs of the many
 - When we do this, we participate (or share) in their deeds
- Glenn Barker comments on this with a helpful analogy

Parents must discriminate as to whom even among their relatives they entertain in their home. Some relatives might be of such questionable character as to menace the moral, spiritual, and physical welfare of the children. Such relatives must be excluded. Parents must balance their concern for their relatives with their responsibility for their children.

- Finally, John ends with a statement of longing to share more in person

2John 12 Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full.

2John 13 The children of your chosen sister greet you.

- His final words indicate what we suspected in the beginning
 - The persecution of the church had made sharing details difficult
 - So John said what he could and promised more in detail later
- And therefore his closing uses the same analogy of ladies and children
 - We must wait until we see John in Heaven to learn what more he wanted to say