

ONE HIT WONDER - SECOND JOHN:

Today we move to the third book in our series entitled one hit wonders. These are the books of the Bible with only one chapter. We have looked at Obadiah, the only one hit wonder in the Old Testament. Then last week we looked at the book of Philemon. Today we look at the second of three letters. The book of second John.

John wrote more than these letters. He also wrote one of the four biographies of Jesus that we have in the Bible the gospel of John. He also wrote the last book of the Bible the book of Revelation. He’s second only to the apostle Paul in terms of having the most material in the New Testament.

2 John: 1-13.

¹ The elder, To the lady chosen by God and to her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth— ² because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: ³ Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love. ⁴ It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. ⁵ And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. ⁶ And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

⁷ I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. ⁹ Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. ¹¹ Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work. ¹² I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. ¹³ The children of your sister, who is chosen by God, send their greetings.

First, in verse one, John self-identifies as “the elder.” This means Bishop or elder. So, whenever you see the word elder in the Bible, it’s not about age - just think pastor. So, John, as the pastor, is writing to (and here’s what may sound a little strange) “the chosen lady.”

So why did he start off as if writing to a woman and her children? It was code in case the letter got intercepted by the wrong people. During the time that John wrote this, the church was under ferocious persecution. **To avoid letters like this being found and used to persecute a group of Christians, they would often disguise letters to the church as letters to a person, because it was often illegal to gather as a church. James Emery White.**

Second John is a message from the front lines of a battle that was raging. The Greek has a bit of a desperate tone. This was written to a church under siege. **John writes with two purposes in mind; to firm up his follower’s commitment to the truth and to warn them**

about the severity of their opponents and the need to protect themselves. Gary Burge, NIV Application Commentary on the letters of John.

Further, in the New Testament, the Church was often called the “Bride of Christ,” and female imagery for the Church was common in other ways. Also, the use of the word “chosen” only adds to this, because it was a common term for Christians as they would speak of being the chosen in Christ.

So, John writes as the pastor, the elder, to the chosen lady, the Church, and then he adds these words: **“... whom I love in the truth — and not I only, but also all who know the truth — because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: “Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love. II John 1-3.**

John’s phrase, “whom I love in truth”, was for John and his followers. Truth was only through the incarnate Jesus, ¹⁷ **For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:17.** ⁶ **Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6.** Also, the phrase, “the truth which lives in us” is as reference to the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, a community of love is also a community of truth, namely a community that has embraced Jesus and experienced the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. So, the three-fold blessing of verse there is, “Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love. 1 John 1: 3 are not a wish or a hope but a certainty that God and Jesus will be with us.

In verses seven to eleven, John moves from truth and love that inspire celebration to treachery and deception that are lurking just outside the church doors. These defectors are numerous. The word deceivers in the original Greek can be translated, ‘liars’. Jesus uses this word in Matthew 24:4, **11 and 24.** ⁴ **Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you”, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people, ²⁴ For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.**

Verse seven makes it clear that these people have not only left the church and taken up residence in the world but have ‘gone out into the world’ to spread their teachings. 1 John 4: 1-3 describes their work well, ¹**Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.**

The use of this term antichrist describes anyone who is opposed to Jesus and who dismantles the very centre of our faith, namely his incarnation. Verses eight to nine form John’s very firm word to his followers. It’s a reminder of how serious their situation is. John does not want then to lose all that they have gained.

The phrase “run ahead’ in Greek is a term denoting superiority but here it is used in a negative way. This is not progress in the faith but progress beyond it. It can also mean advances and is likely an appeal to the heretic’s elitist attitudes. They are trying to pull up the ancient moorings of tradition.

This why John repeats the idea, “Let remain in you what was from the beginning’, he points this out in 1 John. **¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 1 John 1:1.**

⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. 1 John 2:7.

²⁴ As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. 1 John 2: 24.

John realises what is at stake. The incarnate Christ is the only person through whom we know God. Jesus is the only one who saves. We come to God the father through God the son. On this point the Apostle is uncompromising. I like how Gary Burge puts this in his commentary on John, **“to jettison the premier place of Jesus as the exclusive self-disclosure of God, to deny Jesus full humanity is to lose God altogether.” Gary M Burge, NIV Application Commentary, the Letters of John.**

Verse ten to eleven go even further. The consequence of this false teaching is so serious that it demands a serious reaction. No hospitality is to be given to these types of people and their false doctrine. This goes against the New Testament which teaches us to be hospitable. **⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4: 8-10. ² Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2.**

So, how are we to view these troubling verses. Remember this is a letter to those who are on the battlefield for the Christian faith. They underscore the extreme danger the church is in when it not only tolerates but invites us into its midst those whose teachings undermine Christianity. Further, John is not referring to a personal visit, but the Greek indicates that he means an audience to the gathered church.

Also, when John refers to receiving them into your house in verse ten, he has in mind a primary place for worship and prayer. In other words, a house church. **⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Romans 16:5. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. Colossians 4: 15.** So, therefore John is not forbidding private hospitality but rather an official welcome into the gathered church where they can bring their false teaching.

Who were these false teachers and what were they teaching? Their central teaching was that spirit is entirely good, and that matter is entirely evil. From that flowed at least five

critical false teachings First, that man’s body, which is matter, is therefore evil. It is to be contrasted with God, who is wholly spirit and therefore good.

Second, they taught that salvation is the escape from the body, achieved not by faith in Christ but by *special knowledge*. That’s where they got their name. The Greek word for knowledge is gnosis, which is why they became known as Gnostics and their beliefs Gnosticism. Third, they denied the true humanity of Jesus. If he was truly the Christ, the Messiah, God the Son, then He couldn’t have come in human form. That would have involved matter, and matter is evil.

A fourth idea they held was that since the body was considered evil, it was to be treated harshly. Finally, their beliefs led them to rampant immorality. The reasoning was that since matter was considered evil, breaking the law was of no moral consequence. Do what you want! John certainly didn’t want that spreading through the church, and it was so serious, he calls them antichrists.

Now, he didn’t mean they were THE antichrist spoken of in the book of Revelation as coming onto the scene during the end times. John is saying that prior to his coming, there will be many small “a” antichrists. Which simply means they stand against Christ, against who he really was, what he really did. Things like denying the divinity of Jesus; denying the humanity of Jesus – anything but embracing that God was in human form.

A few days after the devastating earthquake of 2011 hit Christchurch, a number of the Baptist Union staff went to Christchurch to hold a meeting with pastors to see how we could help. I was working for the union at that stage and so I went with them. After the meeting we all had lunch together. A couple of strangers turned up wanting to talk to the national Leader.

So, he invited them to have lunch with us. It became clear that they had a clear agenda for their visit. They believed that the earthquake was a judgement from God on New Zealand. They wanted his permission to visit all our churches with this message. It was at this point that they were told, in no certain terms that this would not be allowed. We spread the word quickly around our churches. Nevertheless, they still tried to gain access to many of our Sunday pulpits but were rebuffed.

While it’s true we don’t have strangers walking through our church doors on Sundays wanting access to our pulpit to deliver weird and wonderful theology, there is the need to take care who you let in your homes, especially, via you tube or the internet. Slick, attractive presentations can subtly undermine your faith. John, would say, stop letting them into your life. The same goes for door knockers. It’s why if you want to be a member at this church you must sign off on the basic tenants of the Christian faith. Then, as a member you can become a leader in the church.

So, there you have the second letter of John in the New Testament. A letter that reminds us to love boldly, but never at the expense of truth. The Christian faith is about love, but it is a love that must be discerning and sometimes involve protection of the church.