Hi Everyone. Thank you for reading this message. At Golden Hills we are committed to exalting Jesus and preaching the Word. Your downloading of this message is a great encouragement to us, as we know that our ministry is going out to spread God’s Word all over the world.

We want you to know, too, that in no way do we intend these messages to be a replacement for your involvement in a good local church, where, sitting under the authority of pastors and other teachers, you can learn to worship, grow and serve and be engaged with a body of believers where you can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We realize also, that some of you may be in areas of the world where there is no local church. Therefore, we hope you are using this message to gather with your family or other believers, or people from the community and that it will be a great encouragement to you, as you hear God speak into your life, helping you to become disciples who are true, reproducing followers of Jesus Christ.

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The series for the next four weeks is on Second and Third John. These are two letters which are often overlooked. That’s why we’ve named the series Overlooked Letters. They are also two letters that, even if we read them, we’d probably skim over them real quick and just pass on to the next thing. You have to hurry up and check your Instagram or something. So, we don’t often spend a lot of time on these two letters. I thought this would be a really good thing for us to do – to look at these two letters and see what the Lord has for us.

Today, in 2 John 1-7, we’ll learn about the apostle John’s teaching, that walking in the truth of the gospel, by loving one another, in obedience to Jesus, is John’s priority. It’s his concern for the churches. So his concern in writing these two letters is that we are walking in the truth of the gospel by loving one another, in obedience to Jesus.

That’s where we are heading.

Let’s look at 2 John 1-7. Here is what the apostle John writes:

1 The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, 2 because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

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

4 I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. 5 And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. 6 And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the
commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

Father, we ask for Your wisdom. We ask, God, that as we come to Your word, we are seeking to understand it appropriately and rightly, that You would grant us all we need. You tell us that the Holy Spirit, which abides in us who repent and believe in the gospel, will lead us into all truth. That we, by the Holy Spirit, are granted the very mind of Christ, to plumb the very depths of who You are. So God, would You grant us an abundance, overflowingly so – grant us the presence of the Holy Spirit, in and amongst us, that we may understand and behold wondrous truths in Your word. God, we ask these things in Jesus’ name, amen.

Any time you begin a new series, or you are beginning to read a new book or letter in the Bible, you always want to start with some background information. So that’s where I’m going to start. I am not going to give you a whole host of information because I don’t want to do that. And let’s be honest, you don’t want me to do that. This is less of a lecture, more of a sermon. So I’m just going to give you a little teasing of some background things. If you want more information on anything, please contact us, and we’ll get you pointed in the right direction where you can do some more study.

If you look in your Bible, hopefully you have a good edition of the Bible where you have the letters of 2 and 3 John on pages right next to each other. So as I say things about 2 and 3 John, you can just look back and forth, both at once. Amazing. So make sure you have it open.

We see in 2 and 3 John something pretty interesting. 2 and 3 John are written by the apostle John. I’ll talk about that a little more in a second. He has written these letters, firstly – in 2 John, he writes to “the elect lady and her children.” In 3 John, he is writing to a man named “Gaius”. We don’t know who he is, except for what we can figure out from the letter itself. There isn’t a lot to go on. But in 2 and 3 John, both of these letters have to do with the theme of hospitality. I don’t know if you recognize this, but you’ll see it. 2 John v 10 – is about withholding hospitality from those who are false teachers. You are not to welcome them. You are not to give them hospitality. Then in 3 John is the exact opposite. In verse 6, where missionaries, those who are going out laboring in the name of the Lord, are to be sent out, to be given hospitality for their labors. So hospitality is a major theme. In 2 John it is to be withheld from false teachers. In 3 John, hospitality is to be lavished upon those who are missionaries, going out in the name of the Lord.

Let’s go back to the author. How do we know it’s the apostle John? There are two main reasons. One is this: the early testimony and history of the church shows us that, early on, 2 and 3 John were recognized as letters written by the apostle John. That’s one reason. The second reason is this: when you read the gospel of John, and you read 1 John, and you read Revelation, which for most people, there is no argument as to who authored those three books. Then you start looking at 2 and 3 John, you’ll notice a lot of similarities between the themes and language and vocabulary and style in which they are written. Because of the similarities, we could basically say, if it quacks like a duck, looks like a duck, walks like a duck – must obviously be a cow! Honestly, it is more than likely, the apostle John, who is the author. Because there are so many similarities in language and theme and that kind of stuff.

I love one of the stories told by Jerome, who lived in the 4th and 5th century. He was the one who translated the Bible into Latin. He tells the story about the apostle John, how he was carried into
difference congregations, on the arms of his disciples. As he was carried into these congregations, he was sat down in front of the congregation and they would ask him to speak. Because he was so old, he really couldn’t stand on his own. He didn’t have a lot of voice to project. So he was only able to say this one little phrase, “Little children, love one another.” His disciples began to get kind of annoyed by his saying this one little thing over and over. So they’d ask, “Dude! Do you have anything else?” And John replied to his disciples, “I say this because it is the Lord’s command. And if this only be done, it is enough.”

The apostle John is the apostle of love. He was all about making sure we obey the commands of God and love one another. But he is also the apostle who was doggedly committed to the truth. He was not an apostle who was overly sentimental, meaning he would study his philosophy but he would also watch his Hallmark movies. He was not one or the other. He was a man who did both.

So who is he writing to? We said in 3 John, it is Gaius. We don’t know much about him. We’ll get to that in a couple weeks as we approach 3 John.

But in 2 John, the apostle John is writing to the “elect lady and her children.” So you have three options here, about who this is, the recipients of this letter. First, it could be a specific woman, an unnamed woman who has some children. Unfortunately, that is not a good fit because the pronouns that follow in the letter, are plural. So you don’t usually speak to one individual in the plural (unless you don’t understand grammar). So that doesn’t fit. There is a second option which is – it is written to a woman named “Clete” (kle-tay) which means chosen. The reason is because it says, “to the elect lady,” so it could be “to the lady Clete.” That doesn’t quite fit either, because if you look in verse 13, he closes the letter with “the children of the elect sister greet you.” It’s the same kind of Greek phraseology. So you would have “I’m writing to you, Lady Clete, and also your sister, Clete, says hello.” We don’t normally name our children the same name! Confusion may be why. So it is highly unlikely that there would be two ladies in the same family with the same name. Secondly, it would be highly unlikely for this to be Clete, because we have no record of any woman in all of antiquity with the name Clete. None at all. So, hard to believe that, spontaneously, there are these two ladies who happen to be sisters and have the same name, the only one in all of antiquity. It’s highly unlikely.

So then the third option is this: John is writing metaphorically to a local church and its members. He is writing metaphorically, addressing the local church and its members. I think this is the best option. Here is why. When you read through the Bible, you find that God is constantly referring to His people with feminine images, and pronouns. So, God calls His children Israel, “My daughters.” He calls them “my wife”. You can read it in the New Testament in Ephesians 5, where the apostle Paul says, “the body of Christ is not just the body of Christ, but also the bride of Christ.” So there are a lot of feminine pronouns. A lot of feminine metaphors. A lot of feminine imagery to depict God’s relationship to His people.

So that is one good argument. Another is this: when you read in 1 Peter. Peter is also an apostle. He addresses his letter (1 Peter1:1) to the “elect exiles.” That same kind of “elect” identification as John. When you go to the end of his book, 5:13, he closes his book with this final greeting,

She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chose, sends you greetings. So does Mark my son. Greet one another with a kiss of love.
Peter, in the beginning, identifies this whole “elect” theme. Then he picks it up again, “likewise chosen.” He is referring to those who are in “Babylon.” Virtually all scholars believe that he is referring to as *Babylon* – is Rome. He is saying *the church in Rome, they greet you.*

So when you have a feminine imagery throughout the Bible, describing God’s people, and you have the same kind of phraseology in the beginning and end of Peter’s letter. Also in 2 John. Then I think it is probably the best conclusion that we draw – that he is writing to a local church and its members. The elect lady being the church in general. Then her children, being those who are members of it.

Now, where is he writing to? What is the cluster of churches, perhaps? What is the local church perhaps, that he is writing to? We’re not quite sure. But more than likely, it is the city of Ephesus and the churches that are clustered in that region. You probably understand Ephesus and the region of churches there (which are made famous in the Seven Churches of Revelation). The very first church mentioned in the Seven Churches is the church in Ephesus. So more than likely, 2 and 3 John are written – 3 John to a particular person named Gaius, who is probably a leader in one of the churches in that region. And “the elect lady and her children” are probably one, if not more, of the churches in that little cluster in that region of Turkey. Because that is where the apostle John spent most of his ministry life.

Now, Pastor Rick is planning a trip in March of 2021 to go to Greece and Turkey. We’ll go to see the Seven Churches there (from Revelation) and we’ll also follow the apostle Paul on one of his missionary journeys through Greece. So save your money. That is coming up.

Let’s get to the letter itself. The elder, the apostle John is writing to the elect lady – a church – and her children. Then he begins to expand upon his relationship to this local church and its members by saying this: “whom I love in truth. And not only I, but also who know the truth.”

Notice first that the apostle John is talking about how much he loves this church. He says, “whom I love.” But notice that he qualifies his love by saying, “in truth.” It could be understood as this – the apostle John truly loves the church. He truly does. But, I don’t think that’s the best way to look at it. I think the best way is to understand that the apostle John’s love for the church is because of the fact that he is IN the truth and therefore, the truth that he is “in” serves as the basis for the love that he has for the church. The reason I say that is, the next little phrase, after “whom I love in the truth” then you read, “and not only I, but also all who know the truth.” So it isn’t only “I” who love you, John said, but it is also ALL who know the truth love you. In other words, *I know the truth and everyone else who knows the truth, we all love you.*

So, knowing or being in the truth is the basis for a shared love. The reason why love is shared, is because truth is shared. Therefore, truth becomes the basis for love. All who love the truth, are naturally going to love the people who are “in” the truth. Because it is a shared truth.

This is interesting because love and truth go hand in hand throughout the New Testament. You are very aware of this. 1 Corinthians 13 (the “love” chapter) - Every wedding you’ve been to probably quotes or eludes to this text in some way. The apostle Paul writes:

> 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.
That's an important dynamic the apostle Paul identifies – that love has the emotion of rejoicing, but the rejoicing in love is accompanied with the truth. This means, if you want to enjoy love, it has to be enjoyed within the bounds or confines of truth.

Or as the apostle Paul puts it in Ephesians 4:15

15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ

So the apostle Paul once again identifies the fact that we should be speaking truth, but the way we should speak truth should be characterized by love.

So, if you think about it, he says the same thing in two different ways. The truth needs to be spoken in love. But your love needs to be characterized by truth. So you can never be doggedly devoted to truth at the exception of love; you can never be fully committed to love with the exception of truth. You have to have the two together. There must be love in truth, and truth in love.

If you are prioritizing one above the other, you're doing neither.

So we're not talking about a cold, intellectualism when it comes to truth. Nor are we talking about vain sentimentality when we're talking about love. We're saying is we are loving emotionally with the truth of our minds included. It has to be both.

This actually brings us to this question: what is the truth John is referring to? What does he mean by “truth”? Does he mean simply mathematics? Or that the sky is blue? Does he mean something else? What is it? What does he have in mind?

Unfortunately, it would literally take me an entire series of preaching – probably at least 8 – 10 weeks as I charted it out, to unpack TRUTH. So we don’t have time for that now. Instead, I want to simply summarize it by reading a couple things John writes in his gospel. John 1:14

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So when Jesus, who is the eternal Son of God, the Word – when He becomes flesh (incarnate) on Christmas and lives among other people, He is living as the glorious Son of God. He is full of grace and He is full of truth. In other words, when Jesus came, ultimate truth came.

Or in John 1:17, “17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

So let’s jump to John 14:6, a verse we well know. Many of us know it because it was inscribed on the bottom of water cups at In and Out Burger, which are sadly, no longer available. But nonetheless, we know the verse. The apostle John records Jesus saying:

6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

If we ask the question, what does John have in his mind regarding truth? The answer would be – Jesus and the truth that Jesus brings.

Robert Yarbrough in his commentary on 2 John summarized it like this. (This is higher language, so I'll bring it down for those of us need simpler language. I had to read this about four times to figure it out.) He writes:
John's truth is the reality of Jesus imparted through the Holy Spirit, concerning the person and work of Jesus, and all the ethical implications that follow in conformity to God’s will as is taught in the gospel.

I’ll say it my way: Truth in John’s mind is simply the gospel, Christ and everything He has done, and then the gospel’s implications. So it’s Christ, as He is taught in the gospel, who He is and what He has done, and all of the implications that flow from that – everything we ought to do, ethically speaking, from that.

I like how the apostle Paul put it in Colossians 1:3-5 –

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since [because] we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, [identified as] the gospel,

So, for the apostle Paul, the word of the truth is the gospel. So the apostle Paul and the apostle John both would have in their minds that the truth came with Jesus. And is communicated verbally and also written, about the person of Jesus, and about all He has done, and it also includes the ethical implications of the gospel as well. That summarizes the truth.

When we go to 1 John, and for the rest of the sermon, I’m going to focus primarily on the writings of John, because I want us to get a flavor for how the apostle John liked to say things, and what he intends by them.

When we go to the opening words of 1 John, you’ll see how some of these things are put together. 1 John 1:1-4 he writes:

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you,

I’m going to stop here. I’ll simply say this: the apostle John is going to great lengths to help us understand that he has seen, he has heard, he has touched – Jesus. I want to make sure you understand that (he says). I have seen Jesus. I have touched Jesus. I have seen Jesus. Jesus is the word of life. We proclaim to you Jesus. Why? Why is John so adamant to proclaim Jesus and to emphasize the touching, hearing and seeing of Jesus? It comes in the next two words, in verse 3:

so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

So, the apostle John proclaims eternal life in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, whom he has seen, whom he has heard, whom he has touched – this Jesus Christ, who alone has life immortal, and John is proclaiming this Jesus for the purpose of including people into their fellowship. So, you cannot have fellowship with the apostle John and the church unless Jesus is proclaimed. To put it differently, unless the gospel is preached, and unless you believe the gospel, you do not have fellowship with the church or other believers. Nor do you have fellowship with God the Father or God the Son. So the prerequisite for fellowship, the prerequisite for unity, the prerequisite for relationship in the church is that we believe the gospel. Fellowship cannot happen apart from that, which means mutual love for one another cannot happen apart from the gospel. The
gospel has to be proclaimed. The gospel has to be believed. And once it is believed, you participate in a fellowship, and that participation means that we love one another.

If there is no gospel, either spoken or believed, then there is no fellowship no matter what anyone says. I know of Christians who say, *Hey, he says he is a Christian, and he (another) says he is a Christian, so we as individual Christians, let's get together and play video games or watch Netflix for six hours and that is “fellowship.”* No, it isn’t. You’re just getting together with people you like and doing stuff you like. Don’t confuse some sort of club experience with true Christian fellowship. Just because you like to ride bikes doesn’t mean it is fellowship. Fellowship is rooted in the gospel. Fellowship is rooted in the mutual love we experience in the gospel.

Then we read (v.2), the very first word is “because”. This is telling us that what just came before, is only possible “because” of what is about to happen. So the only reason we have fellowship and mutual love, because of the gospel, is “because” of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

2 because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

Forever!

So John is saying that we need to understand that the truth, that is, the gospel and all that Christ is and has done and all the implications that flow out of that – that truth – there is an abiding experience we have presently. It is also something that we will have forever. Not as a potentiality, but as a reality. You have it now. You will have it always. Now and always.

Then in verse 3, John gives this blessing of sorts:

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

Let’s look at what grace, mercy and peace are. It’s real simple.

The word **grace** starts with the letter G. The word “give” starts with the letter G. So you can understand grace by understanding that it is what God gives you, though you do not deserve it.

**Mercy** starts with the letter M. Minus is a word that starts with the letter M. Mercy is God NOT giving you what you do deserve.

**Peace** is the idea that all is well because Jesus is King.

So, grace – we are receiving what we do not deserve: the love and salvation that is found in Jesus Christ.

We are receiving mercy – we are not receiving the just punishment for our sins.

And we receive peace – which is the understanding that all is well because Christ is King.

All of that will also be with us in addition to the truth of the gospel. These are huge implications, brothers and sisters! HUGE!

How is all this possible? How is it possible that we will have an abiding truth, that Christ will live in us by His Holy Spirit now and forever? How is it that we will have grace and mercy and peace forever?
He goes on to say (v 3) these things are …

from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

In other words, they come from God and God's Son, Jesus. That is where they originate from. That’s how they come to us. But they come to us in truth and love. This means the fellowship we experience with one another, which is only possible by the proclamation of the gospel and believing it, where we share in the truth which serves as the foundation or basis for our love, and the mutual love we get to experience and the fellowship. All of that comes from God the Father and God the Son. And we actually have a very tangible experience of that truth and the grace and the mercy and the peace. That same experience we have today will be with us forever. Forever!

Now, I love to anchor things in the truth of God's word and in promises that Jesus has granted us. So I want to jump to John 10:27-30, where the apostle John is going to quote Jesus, and we'll see how we can have such confidence that these things are true. Jesus says –

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one.”

Hooo! What?! Grace, mercy and peace flow to us from God the Father and His Son, Jesus? Truth abides with us forever? YES! How do I know it will be with us forever? Because, if you have repented and believed the gospel you are a sheep. If you are a sheep, the Father has given you to the Son. The Son has given you eternal life. Now, you are in the Son’s hand. No one will be able to snatch you out of it.

I’ll do you one better: you are also simultaneously in the hand of the Father. Since the Father is the greatest of all, no one will be able to snatch you out of His hand either. So you are in the clutches of a double-fisted God, who says, “This is mine!” Whoa! No one will snatch you out of the Son’s hand, nor the Father’s hand. No one! Not even yourself.

Are you kidding me? So you are telling me that the abiding truth of grace and forgiveness and mercy and love and kindness and the strength of Jesus, His tenderness and affection – all of that is mine? Yes! It’s yours. Undeserved, by His grace. But you are in the Son’s hand and you are in the Father’s hand.

As Romans 8 says, “If God is for you, who can be against you?” What could ever separate us from the love of Christ? Nothing! I've got you! “You are Mine and I am yours,” God says. Whoo-hoo! Yes!

So brothers and sisters, as a pastor I just want you to be reassured. God is so for you. Because God is so for Jesus. If you are in Jesus, then God is for you.

We could just end right there!

But there is more. Verses 4-7. This is where the apostle John gets into the meat of his letter, where he is setting up the whole dreadful “do not show hospitality to false teachers” in verses 8-13. We’ll get to that next week. For now, he is setting the table for us. Look at verse 4:

4 I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.
So the apostle John admits that he has heard that somehow, in the church (whatever church it is in that region in Turkey, more than likely Ephesus or the other surrounding churches) that there are some within those churches are walking in the truth. They are walking in the truth of the gospel. Some of them are. Which means – some of them are not. Some are not.

In fact, there was a false teaching that was afoot within the church. Because of that false teaching, a group of so-called Christians, believing this false teaching, decided to leave the church. What remained was those who were truly committed to the gospel. For that, John is rejoicing. “I’m rejoicing that you are still walking in the truth of the gospel.” We could presume that he is also anguished and saddened by those who have abandoned the truth of the gospel.

So he says (v 5) – this is an exhortation, a command. This is what he wants the church to do:

5 And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another.

So in his joy, John then exhorts the church with this command. You need to love one another. You need to love one another. This is not a new command, it is an old one. We’ve had it from the beginning. We need to love one another.

I like how he begins in verse 5, “And now.” I think that phrase is probably an indication that what he is about to say for the rest of his letter, is going to be hard to hear. What he is about to say is challenging. It’s going to potentially cause division in the church. It is going to strain relationships, perhaps. So he says, And now, in light of what it about to happen, I want you to emphasize more than ever, the need to love each other.

You see, in many churches, in order to maintain unity and peace, should there ever be a theological discussion that arises that is significant, for which division ought to happen (and I’ll talk more about that next week), you have two options. You can just run to the next church, OR you can say, let’s forget all doctrine and theology, and just be committed to unity at all costs. What could happen then is, you either compromise the gospel or you totally abandon it for the sake of unity.

John is saying look, what I’m about to do has the potential of disrupting relationships. It’s a theological issue. You could leave like the rest of them, and abandon the gospel. You could stay and try to fight for unity and peace by compromising the gospel. OR you can just trust and stay true to the gospel.

I’m going to always go with number three. Because we learn in verse 3 that grace, mercy and peace are always ours in the gospel. You don’t get peace by abandoning the source of peace.

Jesus said, “Peace I give you, not as the world gives you. I give it to you.”

Why in the world would you abandon the true Jesus for peace? You’re abandoning the source of peace.

So we have to stay committed to the gospel.

John is going to make some polarizing statements. These are not necessarily calculated to win friends and influence others. But he says them.

1 John 3:10-11 – look what the apostle John said. These are very polarizing things to say. He says:
10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

If somebody says look, evaluate your life and see whether or not you love fellow Christians. If you do not love fellow Christians it’s an indication you are a child of the devil. Wait! What? Hold up! This is from the pen of the apostle of love! Huh. Very polarizing thing to say, is it not? But you have to understand that there are great stakes here. There is a lot riding on the truth of the gospel. Your love of other Christians is an indicator of whether or not you actually believe the truth of the gospel.

We should love one another, because God commands it. We’ve already seen it. This is the command: that we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. We should lay down our lives for one another. We have to love one another. You can see this over and over. So John is emphasizing this command to love, but it isn’t just an obedience, that we should pursue love for one another. That’s not the only motivation. There is another motivation. The very voracity, the very truth of the gospel is evidenced by our love for one another, in a missional context. I mean, people will not find the gospel attractive if we, in the church, claim to be believers of the gospel but don’t love one another. If we claim to love one another, yet we gossip and slander and hate one another, then we preach a false gospel.

So we need to make sure we are understanding what Jesus says in John 13:34-35. John records this for us. Jesus says,

A new commandment I give to you, that you should love one another just as I have loved you. You are also to love one another.

Why does He give this commandment? Jesus says,

35 By this [this love you have for one another, as the church] all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

I don’t know what happened in our culture today, but we have flipped this upside-down. We have begun to believe that people will believe that we are Jesus’ disciples if we emphasize and prioritize a love of the world (those outside the church). But Jesus says the exact opposite. He actually says, and Paul confirms this in Galatians 6, that we should love primarily (not exclusively – did you hear me say that? We do not love exclusively, but we do love primarily) the brothers and sisters in our own family.

For, if we go to unbelievers and we say, “you should be a part of us, for God is love and He loves us and cherishes us and He meets all of our needs, and we share love and fellowship with one another.”

They’d say, “Wow! That’s amazing!” Then they come to the church and they see nothing but people backbiting, slandering, gossiping - they are going to say, “Hey! Wait a minute! You told me that you have love and fellowship with God and each other! But I came here and it’s no different than my family! So why do I need Jesus?”

See? So there is a primacy for love for the church. We should make sure that we are loving one another in the church because it is the evidence that we are disciples. As John writes (1 John 3:19-21)
By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.

If you want to have confidence that you are a disciple, the apostle John will say – you just need to look at your love for one another. But if you evaluate your love for other Christians and you see that you're not very good at it, then you have every reason to doubt whether or not you are actually a disciple. But if you want your heart to be reassured, and you want to have confidence before God, repent of your lovelessness, and believe the truth of the gospel as the foundation for the love that you need to display to others.

So, once again we commit ourselves to Jesus. We ask Him to fill us with the love that we cannot conjure up or produce ourselves. So we flee to the cross and the empty tomb. Jesus, help me love! And we will be reassured.

So, obedience, love and the joy of the gospel converge. Verse 6. The apostle John says:

6 And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.

So what is the commandment? He says love is walking according to the commandment, but what is the commandment? Good question.

We don't have to guess, because we have 1 John 3:23-24, where the apostle John himself will answer his own questions. He says (it’s a two-fold commandment):

23 And this is his commandment, (1) that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and (2) love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

He says we know. How do we know? Belief and love. If you believe in the name of Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, who lived a perfect life, was crucified for our sins and rose from the dead for our salvation, and because of that foundation, we are loving one another. Then you can be confident, and rest assured that you are truly a disciple of His.

So continue to walk in that command. What does that mean? Continue to walk in believing the gospel. Continue to walk in loving your neighbor, and also, primarily, loving the church. Continue to walk in these things. For as the apostle Paul wrote (Romans 13:10) –

10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Love is the fulfilling of the law. Therefore, we should walk in this commandment.

I would summarize it like this: This is the command that God has given us from the beginning, that we should walk in. Here it is: We should believe in Jesus as He has taught in the gospel, and we should obediently walk in the implications of the gospel, chiefly, we should love one another in accordance with the gospel. So keep repenting and believing in the gospel day by day, but keep praying and loving the saints as best you know how. Because Jesus says, the world will know that you are My disciples by your love for one another. There are huge things at stake here.

So why is John so adamant that the church walks in obedience to love one another? Why is he so concerned about this? Verse 7:
For [this is the reason why he commands these things and writes about these things: ]
many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of
Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

In other words, the reason why I’m commanding you, church, to be doggedly committed to the
truth and also to love. We don’t want cold intellectualism. We don’t want warm, sentimentality.
We want bold truth, communicated in love and we want love that is in accordance with the truth.
We want both. The reason why I’m asking you to do this (John says) is because there are a lot
of people who are abandoning the church, abandoning the truth of the gospel and they are
teaching things they ought not to teach. Names, it says, they are not confessing the coming of
Christ. This means they do not believe that Jesus is truly God and truly man. They deny His
divinity, or they deny His humanity; therefore they deny the Trinity. These people are deceivers
and the antichrist.

Now, when we turn to 1 John 2:18-22, it answers a lot of question for us. I want to read this.
There are a lot of people all hot and bothered about a whole host of things. One thing I keep
hearing is, I wonder if we’re living in the last days? I wonder if we’re in the last hours? I wonder
who the antichrist is? Oh, the Corona virus?! (Just a word of encouragement, brothers and
sisters, please read your Bible more frequently than you read the news.)

18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so
now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

Ok, so let’s end the discussion, ok? The apostle John, in his day, said that it is the last hour.
The antichrist has already come. Many of them, in fact. All right. Are we good on that? I know
there are many more questions on that – what about so and so? No.

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us [those who
preach these things], they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might
become plain that they all are not of us. 20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One,
and you all have knowledge. 21 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but
because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is the liar but he who
denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the
Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son, has the
Father also.

There are a lot of antichrists. “Anti” means “against.” “Christ – being the second person of the
Trinity. If you are not for Jesus, you are against Him. And if you are against Jesus, you are an
antichrist. These antichrists are identified in that they deny Jesus’ deity, or Jesus’ humanity.
Therefore, they deny the Trinity. So, Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the true divinity of Jesus and
they are antichrists, according to John. Mormon’s deny the full deity of Jesus as a Trinity,
therefore they are antichrists, according to John. Same with Islam. They deny Jesus being full
deity and Trinity, therefore they are antichrists. See where we’re going with this?

Next week I am going to unpack this a little bit more to show how even progressive Christianity
is a form of antichrist. They are in the name of Jesus, but they deny significant things about who
Jesus is, so we have to be wary of these things.

You see, we live in a culture that teaches, even often in churches, that doctrine divides.
Because doctrine divides, we should never talk about doctrine. We just need to love each other.
This is silly because, ok, don’t worry about doctrine; let’s just love each other. But how do you
reconcile the fact that love rejoices with truth? In other words, you can’t love without truth. So if
you abandon truth, don’t you abandon love simultaneously? Or they say, we only need to focus
on doctrine. Doctrine is the only thing that matters. No it doesn’t! What are you talking about?
We need to love. Because cold intellectualism doesn’t do anything. You know, Jesus says the world will know you are My disciples by your love for one another. (Not whether or not you can parse Greek.)

So it has to be truth in love – together, brothers and sisters. Yes, doctrine will divide, but the apostle John says it is necessary that it does so. Because you need to be able to identify those who are truly of God and those who are not. So, theology does indeed matter. Every one of us is a theologian. That is out of the equation of whether or not you are a theologian; all of us are. But the question is not whether or not you do theology, the question is whether or not the theology you do, is bad or not.

The apostle John would say, if you get the question, “Who is Jesus” wrong, it is not just that you fail a test. It is that you run the risk of not being saved. These are huge issues! Having heard all this, I know what will tend to happen: this sermon will go on the internet and someone will share it. They will write on Yelp and on Google, they’re give a review of Golden Hills and say, “Golden Hills is the most unloving church I’ve ever been to. This guy who preaches, Phil Ward, is a total bigot. He doesn’t have any love.” Stuff like that. I wish people would be more honest and say this, “It is not that Golden Hills is saying all this. And it’s not that Phil Ward is saying all this. The apostle John has said this.”

So, brothers and sisters, just understand that Jesus said, “If they hate Me, they’re going to hate you.”

The people who say that they hate what the apostle John says, they hate what he writes, they are not our enemies, but they are people who have been deceived. So, brothers and sisters, you and I have an obligation. For the love we have received, we must go and love the deceived. How to you unblind the minds of the unbelievers? You give them the beautiful truth: Christ. So give them gospel. Give them gospel!

Father, thank You for Your great love for us. God thank You for Your grace and mercy. May not a single person in our church ever feel the sense of pride and arrogance and boastfulness for having come to a knowledge of the truth. But God, may that truth humble us in the reality that we did not deserve to come to know it. But by Your grace, You gave it to us. God, as we go out and as we love one another deeply, in order to authenticate the gospel we preach, may the words we speak with our mouths and the words we speak with our lives, be congruent, so that we are doggedly committed to both truth and love. So that the nations would come to saving faith in Jesus, for Your glory and our joy we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.