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December memory verse: **Isaiah 9:6-7 (NKJV)**

⁶ For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Commentary on Second and Third John, by Chuck Smith

Tonight, we want to look at 2 John and 3 John, all short little one-chapter epistles. The epistles of 2 John and 3 John were of course, written by the apostle John. A situation existed in the early church of itinerant prophets. There were men who traveled and they would come to the various churches that have been established or founded. And they would exercise to the churches their gift of prophecy, speaking through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, in the edifying of the churches, in the comforting of the saints, building up the body of Christ.

Now there were those who would come to the church claiming this gift of prophecy, claiming to be speaking in the name of the Lord who were really false prophets, and they would be giving off with their false concepts under the guise of a prophet. If someone should come in here and say, I'm a prophet of God, you know, and I have a message for the church, we'd send them to Romaine to check out the message.

But in the early church, there would be these groups, itinerant prophets who would travel around, come to the church, minister to the church. Now there came to be abuses with this. There would come those that would claim to be a prophet speaking for God and they'd say, Thus saith the Lord, Prepare a great steak dinner, mashed potatoes and green beans, you know. Or, In the name of the Lord, you know, they would --they would say, Thus saith the Lord, you know, Take care of this man's needs. Give him money for his purse.

So it was necessary in the early church that they write some guidelines for these itinerant evangelists and prophets. And so there was a book known as the Dedike, which means the teachings of the apostles, the didactic. And this Dedike were instructions from the apostles to the various churches on how to judge a false prophet and basically, some of the rules by which they judge them. If they come in, if they came in and ministered, received them and all, accept them, and if they stayed more than three days, then they were false prophets. Started living off the people, you know.

And they did have a rule in the Dedike, it said, If they order a meal prepared in the name of the Lord, and if they eat of that meal, they're a false prophet. But if they order it prepared for the poor, and all, and don't partake, then they are to be accepted and honored. If they, in the name of the Lord, you know, order money to be given to them, they were false prophets. Now in the second epistle that John writes, he deals with the truth. Of course, both epistles are very interested in the truth. And in the first one, he deals with those false prophets and their false testimony concerning Jesus Christ.

In the third epistle, he deals with one of the men in the church who did not want any prophets coming in, would not accept or receive any of them because he himself was one of the preeminence. And to Gaius, who the third epistle was addressed to, he told them that he did well in accepting and giving hospitality to these itinerant prophets and evangelists and that there was one, Demetrius, who was coming and he encouraged him to receive him. He was a good man. So behind the two epistles lie these itinerant prophets and evangelists who just traveled around, sort of nomads in the early church. And of course, the theme of both of the epistles is truth.

So the first or the second epistle of John, he writes to the, he writes addressing himself as the elder. Now that word "elder" could mean aged or ancient. It also was a title within the churches. Each of the churches had their elders who were the overseers of the church, but the Greek word "presbytuos" was originally just used for an aged person. At this point when John is writing, he's probably over ninety years old, so he's very qualified to call himself the elder. Both of these epistles, if you'll notice, are quite short and in both of them, he mentions that there are a lot of things he wants to write about, but he will save that until he sees them face to face. He'd rather just talk to them about it than write to them about it.

Now in those days, they had a writing material, a parchment, that was 8 x 10 inches, which is close to the 8 1/2 x 11 notebook paper that you grew up in school with. And interestingly enough, each of these little epistles would fit very well on one of those little 8 x 10 pieces of paper. So that's probably what John originally wrote these on, just some of that original parchments that they had, 8 x 10 inches and he wrote out these little epistles.

SECOND JOHN

But he calls himself the aged,

The elder unto the elect lady and her children ([2Jo 1:1](#)),

Now there is, you know, question as to who the elect lady was, if it were actually a person, an individual, or if he was writing to a church. "The elect lady and her children." We don't know. But he said,

whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth ([2Jo 1:1](#));

As I said, the truth is the theme of the epistle.

For the truth's sake, which dwells in us, and shall be with us for ever ([2Jo 1:2](#)).

Jesus said my words are truth. He said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, my words shall not pass away" ([Matthew 24:35](#)). The truth exists forever. And so I love in the truth. I love in truth. And all they that have known the truth, for the truth's sake.

Grace be with you, and mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love ([2Jo 1:3](#)).

Grace, mercy and peace: these are common greetings in the New Testament epistles. Usually just grace and peace, some of them is added mercy. To Timothy and Titus was added grace, mercy and peace. The grace of God is God's unmerited favor to you. It's getting what you don't deserve, the goodness of God, the blessings of God which we don't deserve, yet God bestows upon them. That's grace. Mercy is not getting what you do deserve.

David when he prayed, prayed very wisely, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" ([Psalm 51:1](#)). And whenever I pray, I always pray, Have mercy upon me, O God. I never say, O God, I want justice. I'd be burning, mercy, Lord, not getting what I deserve. But God goes one step further, grace, hey; He gives me what I don't deserve, His love, His goodness, His kindness, His blessings. I don't deserve them but He bestows them upon me, the grace of God, the mercy of God and peace.

He said,

I rejoiced greatly that I found thy children walking in truth ([2Jo 1:4](#)),

Boy, if you don't know that truth is the theme of the epistle, you ought to know it by now. He in each of the verses so far has mentioned it at least once, sometimes more than once. "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth,"

as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another ([2Jo 1:4-5](#)).

This is really the essence of the New Testament and the commandments of Jesus. Jesus said, "A new commandment give I unto thee, That you love one another." Jesus said, "By this sign shall men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another" ([John 13:34-35](#)). This is a sign to the world.

Now unfortunately, the church's witness to the world hasn't been that good. When churches get in squabbles with each other, when there is fighting and division in the body, it's a very poor witness to the world. It's no sign that we're His disciples. "We

know," John said, "that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" ([1 John 3:14](#)). How do I know that I've really passed from death unto life? God's love planted in my heart for the brethren. So the commandment that we have from the beginning is that we should love one another.

And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it ([2Jo 1:6](#)).

So we should walk in love. Love one towards another. This is the agape love that's sacrificing, self-effacing, giving love.

Now he deals with,

Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist ([2Jo 1:7](#)).

Remember in his first epistle, he said, "Believe not every spirit but try the spirits to see if they be of God. And every spirit that testifieth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: But every spirit that testifies not that Jesus is come in the flesh is not of God: the spirit of antichrist, which is already at work in the world" ([1 John 4:1-3](#)). So now again he talks about "deceivers entered into the world, who confess that Jesus Christ, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" ([2 John 1:7](#)).

Interestingly enough, though it looks identical to his first epistle, there is a very interesting difference in the Greek. That difference lies in the tense. And in the second epistle here that we are considering tonight, the word literally is "coming in the flesh." Now in the first epistle, it was that He had come in the flesh; that is, His first coming was in the flesh.

You see, there were the Gnostics who declared that Jesus was a phantom, an apparition. There appears to be a person but it wasn't really there. It's just an apparition. That everything of the material is evil, everything that is of material substance is inherently evil. Thus, had Jesus had a material body it would have been evil and He could not have been God; therefore, He did not have a material body because that's evil. All material is evil. And the Gnostics taught that Jesus was just a phantom and they had stories about when He would walk on the sand, you wouldn't see any footprints, you know, and they developed all kinds of things like this. Jesus was an apparition. He didn't really come in the flesh.

John said in the first epistle that whoever declares that was, you know, that's the way you test the spirits to see if they're really of God. Here the test is: Is He coming in the flesh? Now there is a very interesting point to be made here and that is, the Jehovah Witnesses deny that Jesus is coming in the flesh. His coming is a spiritual coming. He came in 1914, established the kingdom of God in the secret chambers. He's not really coming in the flesh. Now what does this then say of those who hold that doctrine?

"Many deceivers are entered into the world who confess not that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."

Now look to yourselves [or be careful], that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God ([2Jo 1:8-9](#)).

Though they claim to have the Father, Jehovah Witnesses, yet their denial of Christ is also denial of the Father.

He that abides in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you ([2Jo 1:9-10](#)), On Saturday morning.

and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him goodbye, God speed: for he that bids him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds ([2Jo 1:10-11](#)).

So when they leave, don't say, Well, God bless you, brother. Or God bless, you don't want God to bless their pernicious ways. They are denying the truth of God that Jesus Christ is God manifested in the flesh and that Jesus is coming in the flesh. They deny that. So don't bid them God bless you. You might say, God bring you to the truth. God bring you out of darkness into the glorious light of His Son, but not God bless you.

Having many things to write unto you, I would not write them with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full ([2Jo 1:12](#)).

Fullness of joy, that's what the Lord wants for every child of God. The fullness of joy is mentioned by Jesus in John, the fifteenth chapter. It's related to abiding in Him. In the sixteenth chapter of the gospel of John, it's related to your prayer life. "Ask, that you might receive, that your joy may be full" ([John 16:24](#)). In the first epistle of John, the fullness of joy is related to our fellowship with God. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you might have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" ([1 John 1:3-4](#)). Now the fullness of joy is related to just getting together with the body of Christ in fellowship.

So there's that fullness of joy as we relate to each other the things of Christ, as we talk about the Lord and about the ministry of the Holy Spirit within our hearts and through our lives. Fullness of joy. "I'd like to write other things to you but I'd rather wait until we see each other face to face, that our joy may be full."

The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen ([2Jo 1:13](#)).

Third John

So the third epistle of John is now again, John addresses himself as

The elder [the presbytueros] unto the wellbeloved Gaius ([3Jo 1:1](#)),

Probably not the Gaius mentioned in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians where he was in Corinth, and it would appear that these letters were written to those in the area of Ephesus.

whom I love in the truth. Beloved ([3Jo 1:1-2](#)),

And he's talking to Gaius.

I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth ([3Jo 1:2](#)).

Now there are many people who quote this scripture as a sort of promise for healing. And they twist the scriptures slightly making it really sort of God's declaration, God saying I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in good health, even as your soul prospers. But this is a personal letter from John to Gaius. And he is greeting Gaius who is well-loved with this beautiful wish that you may prosper and be in good health. As we so often in our letters writing to someone we haven't seen for a long time, I hope that this letter finds you in good health. So to use this as a promise for healing is really not scriptural, as God's promise for healing. It is the wish of John for Gaius. Beautiful wish indeed. "I wish that you might prosper and be in good health, even as your soul prospers."

But it is interesting that there is a relationship made between the prosperity of the soul and the physical well being. And we are discovering more and more as we study the human body that there is a very definite direct relationship between a person's physical health and their mental well-being. We are learning how that attitude can change the body chemistry and that bad attitudes can create harmful chemicals that will attack your body physically. And there's a definite relationship between mental attitude and organic illnesses in many cases. The psychologist say ninety percent, I think, that they're overstressing their side. But there is a definite relationship between many illnesses and the mental attitude of the person. So there's a correlation made between the physical well-being with the mental, the prosperity of the soul, the mind.

There is a proverb that says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine" ([Proverbs 17:22](#)). You know that they have discovered that that is scientifically correct. That laughter aids tremendously in the digestion of food. You ought to have a joke book at your dinner table. Bitterness can eat at your physical being, can create ulcers, chemicals that are harmful, destructive. So it is interesting that John would make the correlation between the physical and the emotional or mental. "I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in good health, even as your soul prospers."

For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as you walk in truth. And I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth ([3Jo 1:3-4](#)).

I can concur with what John is saying here. The greatest joy, I think, of a teacher is to hear that their children are walking in truth. You know, to come across someone that you ministered to fifteen, twenty years ago and find them walking in the truth is just a thrill, no greater joy.

In the same way, there's probably no greater sorrow than to hear that your children have turned from the truth, got caught up in some weird doctrine, some heresy. That's painful, that hurts. But "no greater joy than to hear that they are walking in the truth."

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do to the brethren, to the strangers; Which have borne witness of your love before the church: whom if you bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, you will do well ([3Jo 1:5-6](#)):

Now he's talking about Gaius's treatment of these itinerant evangelists and prophets. You've been hospitable to them. You've helped them along their way. And in this you did well. It was, and they've come, and they've told of your love. They've told of your hospitality.

Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing from the heathens ([3Jo 1:7](#)).

So these itinerant prophets have gone forth in the name of the Lord and for his name's sake, but they wouldn't take anything from the Gentiles, which is in the New Testament Greek the heathen or the pagans, because in Christ, you know, they were all brothers. "There is no Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian" ([Colossians 3:11](#)). So the Gentiles referred to those outside of Christ.

I question some of the fund raising techniques of the churches today that go to the major corporations or they go to the businesses or they go to the world to find financing for the ministry and for the work of the church. The early prophets that went forth did not practice that. In fact, as I told you, if they asked for money they were considered to be a false prophet. That's the apostle wrote their Dedike and they said if they ask for money they're false prophets. So he is encouraging Gaius in his hospitality, the love that he had shown was good.

It had been reported and he said,

We ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers of the truth. Now I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, did not receive us ([3Jo 1:8-9](#)).

Diotrephes, an interesting character. We look how his sin has been exposed throughout the years. A man who loved the preeminence in the church. He didn't want to give, you know, any place to anybody else. He wanted the preeminence. So when these prophets would come in, he wouldn't receive them. In fact, he even refused John the beloved, apostle of the Lord. There are Diotrephes still in the church today, those who are

looking for a position for themselves, those that are looking for a place of power and authority, who want preeminence.

So John said,

Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids them that would, and casts them out of the church ([3Jo 1:10](#)).

I mean, this guy was a real tyrant. He wouldn't receive these itinerant ministers and if someone in the church would receive them, he'd throw them out of the church.

John's exhortation is

Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. And he that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God ([3Jo 1:11](#)).

Again here, John puts the emphasis upon what a person is doing. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourself" ([James 1:22](#)). "Not he who has the law is justified by the law, but he who does the law is justified by the law" ([Galatians 3:11-12](#)).

Having the knowledge of Jesus Christ doesn't save you. It's following Him as your Lord that brings salvation. It isn't mouthing the Apostle's Creed that will save you. It's what are you doing. You're doing good, then you're of God, but if you're doing evil, you really don't know God.

Demetrius has a good report of all men ([3Jo 1:12](#)),

And probably this letter was given to Demetrius who was headed that way as a letter of reference from John and he told him to give it to Gaius, and so he is encouraging now, when Demetrius gets there to receive him. "Demetrius has good report of all men,"

and of the truth itself: yes, and we also bear record; and you know that our record is true. Now I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face ([3Jo 1:12-14](#)).

So as he closed the second epistle, so he closes the third with the anticipation of seeing him, not having to write to him the things that are on his heart.

Peace be to thee. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends [my friends] by name ([3Jo 1:14](#)).