





Love...

What's the word mean?

Should there be any limits on love?

Or let me ask the same question slightly differently:
Should love have any boundaries?

1 Cor. 13:4-7—Do you ever think of those things as limitations on love, or boundaries?

- Patience, kindness, no envy, no boasting, no arrogance, no rudeness, no self-exaltation, no irritation, no resentment, no rejoicing at wrongdoing, rejoicing with truth, bearing and believing and hoping and enduring all things.
- How do those function as boundaries on love?

Love...

What happens when there are no boundaries on love? What does that look like?

There are a lot of boundaries (though we might not think of it that way) on love in Scripture—for example:

- Eph. 5:25
- Eph. 5:33
- Phil. 2:1-4
- Phil. 1:9
- Matt. 5:44
- Matt. 22:37
- John 5:13
- Rom. 12:9

John writes to a local church likely in the area of Ephesus. As with all of the epistles in the NT, something was happening—something prompted John to write this letter. What was going on?

It seems like false teaching—doctrinal confusion—was seeping in to many (if not all) of the churches we see spoken of in the NT. So—what do you do?

John reinforces Christ's command to love one another (John 13:34), then shows how this love has two limits: Love in truth (v. 4-6), and love with discernment (v. 7-11). His point: Love one another to prevent the damaging spread of deception in the church.

This might be an interesting question to think about: we often characterize the love of God as an *unconditional* love.

- What do we mean by *unconditional*?
- By *unconditional*, do we mean with no restraints or limitations or boundaries whatsoever?

God loves me in my miserable condition caused by my own sin...

- ...but He will not leave me in my misery.
- ...and He will not take me in to His presence in my miserable condition—there must be a profound, fundamental change: a new creation, a new heart.
- ...and God disciplines those He loves to change them even further (Heb. 12:5-6, 10).

Well, let's get into the text...

Here's the outline we're using for 2 John:

- v. 1-3 ~ John's greeting to the church he loves:
Grace, mercy, and peace
- v. 4-6 ~ John's request of the church he loves:
love one another.
- v. 7-11 ~ John's concern for the church he loves:
watch yourselves.
- v. 12-13 ~ John's desire for the church he loves:
that our joy may be complete.

John's request of the church he loves ~ v. 4-6

I suppose it's possible to over-outline things, but, well, here's a little sub-outline of this passage:

- John's rejoicing ~ v. 4
- John's request ~ v. 5-6
- John's reason ~ v. 7

Ok—we've divided the text at v. 6, and we're not looking at v. 7 today, but it's important for us to see the larger context of v. 4-6.

- All that John says in v. 4-6 is connected to his main thrust in v. 7-11—notice the word *For* in v. 7.
- In the Gk, *For* is a conjunction, connecting what came before with what comes after (see Matt. 5:3-8).

John's request of the church he loves ~ v. 4-6

John is thinking like a shepherd when he thinks of the church he is writing to. What do I mean by that?

- Notice in v. 4—John is excited about what he sees...in some.
- And in v. 5-6 he sees a deficiency—there is a need for those in the church to love each other more consistently, genuinely.
- And in v. 7-11 he sees a danger that must be addressed.
- He is concerned about their souls ~ v. 8, and about their joy ~ v. 12

John's request of the church he loves – v. 4-6

v. 4— John found cause for rejoicing at what he saw in the church...what did he see?

- “some...walking in the truth.”

“walk” in Scripture is...what?

- It can mean putting one foot in front of the other repeatedly, i.e., Matt. 9:5, 11:5; Acts 3:8-9, etc.
- But more often it is figurative—it is the trajectory of life, the daily path of choices we make: walk in light (1 Jn. 1:6), walk like Jesus walked (1 Jn. 2:6), walk in the truth (2 Jn. 4), walk in obedience to His commands (2 Jn. 6), walk in love (2 Jn. 6). Additional refs: Rom. 6:4, 8:4; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:8.

John's request of the church he loves – v. 4-6

v. 4—That some were doing the best they could with what they knew to walk consistently in the truth brought John great joy...

John Stott: “God has not revealed His truth in such a way as to leave us free at our pleasure to believe or disbelieve it, to obey or disobey it.

Revelation carries with it responsibility, and the clearer the revelation, the greater the responsibility to believe and obey it.”

You know the answer to this question, but I'll ask it anyway: How do you walk in the truth?

John's request of the church he loves ~ v. 4-6

Answer: we need a lot of help.

- We need to have Scripture on our minds regularly ~ Ps. 119:105. That is God's primary means of help and guidance. Also Rom. 15:4.
- We need the Holy Spirit to guide through the Scriptures ~ Gal. 5:16. He enables us to both understand and apply God's Word.
- We need the corporate gathering of the church ~ Eph. 4:11-16. This is critical and essential.
- And we need the church, the body of Christ, in smaller chunks as well: individually, small groups, etc. ~ 2 Tim. 2:22; Heb. 3:13.

John's request of the church he loves – v. 4-6

In v. 4 we saw John's rejoicing...here in v. 5 is his request: "love one another."

This has sometimes been referred to as the 11th Commandment...any guesses why?

Take a look at John 13:34—Jesus says this is a "new commandment." But is it *new*?

- The foundation: Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18.
- See Mark 12:28-31.

But Jesus deepens and transforms that command:

- Matt. 5:43-48 – love even your enemies.
- John 13:34, 15:13 – "just as I have loved you..."

John's request of the church he loves – v. 4-6

Ok—here's the problem with this passage: we've already talked a lot about things we know.

- The meaning of the word “walk”—we have a pretty good sense of that.
- The biblical meaning of love—that too.
- Love as a command of God (not a mushy mix of feelings)—we get that.

We have to remember that this is a letter—it was written in response to something. It was written to address a very real and very persistent danger, and John saw that the love of the church—the saints—for each other was the best way to deal with it.

John's request of the church he loves ~ v. 4-6

So remember the intensity of the love of John, the old man, the aging shepherd of Christ's saints: he has seen many follow Christ to the end against much deception and pressure...and he has seen many drift and fall by the wayside because of deception and pressure (1 John 2:19).

- This is a lot like Paul in Acts 20:17-31. Notice the intensity of his warning and pleading.
- This is also why John wrote 1 John 5:21.
- And this is why Peter wrote 2 Pet. 3:14-18.

You almost sense a desperation in the voices of these old shepherds: "Finish well!"

John's request of the church he loves – v. 4-6

You see that in v. 7-8 here: there are many deceivers in the world, the very antichrist is active in the world, so *“watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.”*

These are not nice religious words John is writing—this is the passion of a shepherd for his sheep.

And so John rejoices that some are walking in the truth—they are, as John MacArthur puts it, “moving through life controlled by the truth.”

- Firmly grounded in Scripture—understanding it and applying it.
- One more time, this is the message of Psalm 1.

John's request of the church he loves ~ v. 4-6

John then exhorts the believers to love each other, and we get this thought:

If we are going to successfully live out the life of Christ in us, if we are going to follow Christ for a lifetime while the deceptive lies and half-truths and distortions of sound doctrine of the enemy are swirling around us...

- ...it can only be done in community. Professing Christians living in isolation from the body of Christ will fail. They are easy prey for the deceivers, the antichrists in the world today. Remember Proverbs 18:1.

John's request of the church he loves ~ v. 4-6

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If we are going to successfully live out the life of Christ in us, if we are going to follow Christ for a lifetime while the deceptive lies and half-truths and distortions of sound doctrine of the enemy are swirling around us...

- ...and it can only be done when that community lives in a God-defined love for each other. This commandment to love one another—"walk in it" (v. 6)—Jesus defines it broadly in John 13:34; the rest of the NT fleshes it out more specifically.

John's request of the church he loves – v. 4-6

Take a look at Paul's prayer for the Philippian church in Phil. 1:9-11. What is he praying for?

He prays for a growing, discriminating, discerning, constrained love.

- Again, this is the love Jesus described in John 13:34—*“just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”*
- Paul prays for a growing love, but not just a sentimental, everything-must-be-tolerated, mushy, indiscriminate love; rather, he prays for a love characterized by “knowledge and all discernment.”
What does this kind of love look like?

John's request of the church he loves ~ v. 4-6

A love characterized by *knowledge*: What is that?

Where does it come from?

- A mature grasp of the gospel, a love that is informed by sound instruction in the truth of Scripture. Read, study, memorize, meditate, hear the preaching of Scripture regularly.

A love characterized by *all discernment*: What is that? Where does it come from?

- The ability to take the sound instruction of Scripture (*knowledge*) and apply it across the spectrum of life's experiences (exactly the same concept as wisdom in Proverbs).

John's request of the church he loves ~ v. 4-6

Love regulated by Scripture—does this stifle and diminish love?

- No—it purifies and beautifies it and makes it into a noble thing.

Love shaped, honed, and directed—constrained—by the Lord's commands is the best way to counteract and even prevent the damaging influence of deception. Without this we are easily influenced.

- John envisions a growing Christianity, not a stagnant one. A maturing, discerning Christian discipleship happens in the context of mutual love.

“You are no lover of Christ if you do not love His children. As soon as ever the heart is given to the Master of the house it is given to the children of the house. Love Christ and you will soon love all that love Him. I am told that Christians do not love each other. I am very sorry if that be true, but I rather doubt it, for I suspect that those who do not love each other are not Christians. Now no man is a Christian who does not love Christians. He, who, being in the church, is not yet of its heart and soul, is but an intruder in the family.” ~ Charles Spurgeon