

John: The Apostle of Love

2 John

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567

Ever wonder what kind of personality is best to have to serve God in His kingdom? While those who have a passionate, zealous and ambitious personality have the drive to “push” others to obey God’s commands and accomplish His goals, in their aggression they are often too legalistic, reckless, volatile and brash to be effective in God’s kingdom. While those who mourn with those who mourn, bless and pray for those who persecute them and practice hospitality towards all people in the church (regardless of position) certainly fulfills the command to love one another; without passion for the truth such people often promote the “social club” atmosphere of a church that is either lukewarm and/or full of heresy! Is it possible to develop a personality that has a balance of both passion for the truth and love and grace for all others? Apostle John certainly did! This sermon is going to begin by describing the background and leadership style of John and finish with how John balanced truth with love, ambition with humility and suffering with glory and in doing so became known not only as one of the “Sons of Thunder” but also the “Disciple Jesus Loved.”

Background

John’s family lived close to Bethsaida where he and his brother James had a fishing business (Mark 1:21, 29), with Andrew and Peter as likely partners (Luke 5:10).¹ John’s father’s name was Zebedee (Matthew 4:21, Mark 1:19-20) and most likely his mother’s name was Salome (Matthew 27:56).² Because Zebedee had hired servants and Salome often cared for the needs of Jesus (Mark 15:40, Matthew 27:55-56), John most likely grew up in a relatively prosperous middle class home.³ His father Zebedee was not only well to do but also had enough status that John was “was known to the high priest.”⁴ Walking beside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus called John and James who immediately left the boat and the fishing business (Matthew 4:18-22). John is always listed in the top three names of the apostles, along with Peter and his brother James (Matthew



¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “[Peter, The Apostle.](#)” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1659.

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, 1089–1090.

³ Donald A. Hagner, “[James \(Person\).](#)” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 617.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You](#)

10:2-4; Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:13-14)⁵ who were part of Jesus' inner circle.⁶ According to tradition John was banished to the island of Patmos, wrote the book of Revelation and then returned to Ephesus where according to Eusebius, Tertullian, Polycrates and Jerome⁷ he ended up dying at an old age and of natural causes.⁸ Even though historical criticism suggests John did not write any books of the Bible, early church tradition has John as the author of John, first, second and third John and the book of Revelation.⁹

Leadership Style

Upon the start of their ministry John and James had similar personality traits and leadership styles.¹⁰ Like James, John was part of Jesus' inner circle of three who alone got to accompany Jesus in the raising of the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51), to witness the



transfiguration of Christ (Mark 9:2; Matthew 17:1; Luke 9:28) and to accompany Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33).¹¹ Also, like James who was often brash, clumsy, hasty and impulsive; John could be described with similar traits such as “narrow-minded, unbending, reckless and passionate.”¹² John was so passionate that Jesus gave him and his brother James the title of “Boanerges” (Mark 3:17) which meant “Sons of Thunder.”¹³ For having asked Jesus to kill the people of a Samaritan village, for having sought a position of authority over the other

disciples and for having rebuked a man for casting out demons in Jesus' name, John demonstrated the dangers of having “unbridled” passion without grace! And yet by allowing the Lord's strength to be made perfect in these weaknesses,¹⁴ later in life John learned to balance truth with love, ambition with humility and suffering with glory and as a result ended up personifying his title “The Disciple Jesus Loved!”

⁵ George W. Knight, [“Andrew, The Apostle.”](#) *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 87.

⁶ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, 1089.

⁷ R. V. G. Tasker, [“John, the Apostle.”](#) ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 593.

⁸ Raymond F. Collins, [“John \(Disciple\).”](#) ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 885.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John F. MacArthur Jr., 96.

¹¹ Donald A. Hagner, 617.

¹² John F. MacArthur Jr., 97.

¹³ Donald A. Hagner, 617.

¹⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., 97.

Balancing Truth with 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.

2 John 7-11

In his letter to the church of the Johannine community,¹⁵ John showed how passionate he was to proclaim and protect the truth concerning the incarnate Jesus and His teachings. Anyone who “advanced” beyond the limits of Christ’s teachings¹⁶ according to John were not to be even welcomed in a person’s home for to do such an act would be paramount to sharing in the work



of deceivers and antichrists! From this passage we learn that John wrote and thought in absolutes as can be seen elsewhere in his writings.¹⁷ Those who do not walk in the light, walk in the darkness and have no fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-7). Only those who believe in Jesus (John 3:18) are born of the Spirit (John 3:5-6), declared children of God (John 1:12) and receive eternal life (John 3:36). Only those who do not sin (1 John 3:9),¹⁸ love others (1 John 4:7-8), forgive others (John 20:23) and have evidence of fruitfulness in their lives

(John 15) can claim they have passed from death to life (John 5:24). While those who refuse to refuse to hear and obey His commands do not love Jesus (John 14:23-24); those who hate a brother or sister (1 John 2:9-11) and love this world (1 John 2:15) belong to the Devil (John 8:44) and stand condemned (John 16:11) to be thrown into the fire and burned (John 15:6).

¹⁵ Thomas F. Johnson, [1, 2, and 3 John](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 147.

¹⁶ Glenn W. Barker, “[2 John](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 365.

¹⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., 97.

¹⁸ John certainly believed Christians sinned (1 John 1:9) but does not go into details like Paul did to explain the difference between those who have never surrendered their desire to sin to God and those who struggle with sin as in Romans 6 and 7.

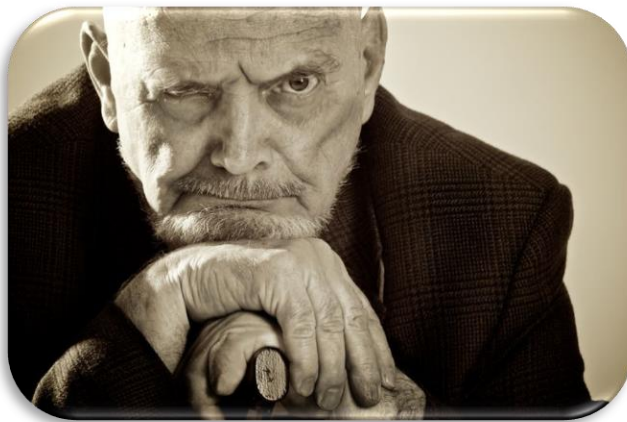
In today's world we need people like John who know God's word and are not scared to preach the truth that sets us free (John 8:32)! We live in an age when people no longer believe



in absolute truth. Postmoderns believe it is only through individual experiences, emotions and intuition that one derives truth from reality.¹⁹ As a result, most people and yes even Christians no longer put up with sound doctrine but instead prefer what their "itching ears" want to hear (2 Timothy 4:2) ... that sin in my life does not exist! This era needs to be told that truth is not based on the unending viewpoints and perspectives of individuals,²⁰ and illusion of this perceived chaotic world;²¹ but on the Bible as the final arbiter of truth.²² Like the Psalmist we are

not only to delight and meditate on His word day and night (Psalms 1:2) but are to invite the Spirit to search our hearts (Psalms 139:23-24) so that the planks in own eyes that we so easily justify (Matthew 7:3-5) might be seen for what they are: sin that must be confessed (1 John 1:9) and no longer cherished (Psalms 66:18)!

While it is not a bad thing to have passion to know and want others to obey God's word, without a balance of love for one another it can lead to "judgementalism, harshness and a lack of compassion."²³ For example, when a Samaritan village refused to provide



lodging to Jesus and His disciples because they were going to Jerusalem to do God's will, the "Sons of Thunder" asked Jesus if He wanted them to call down fire and kill the villagers (Luke 9:51-56). Even though the Samaritans were guilty of intermarrying with foreigners and embracing foreign gods (2 Kings 17:33),²⁴ did not mean that Jesus wanted them destroyed for His mission was not to judge the world but to save them (John 12:46-

¹⁹ Grenz, Stanley J. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, 43. Wells, David F. *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers, and Emmergents in the Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008, 97.

²⁰ Ibid., 19.

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²² Ryrie, Charles C. *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, 76.

²³ John F. MacArthur Jr., 100.

²⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., 81.

47).²⁵ When we attempt to force others into obeying the letter of the law²⁶ one can easily forget that while God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6), He prefers to show them grace by giving them every opportunity to obtain “full maturity, perfect Christlikeness” (Ephesians 4).²⁷ This does not mean that we have a license to sin (Romans 6:1) but merely that we will be given every opportunity to repent (1 John 1:9). Early in John’s ministry he had not learned this lesson.

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.

2 John 4-6

In his letter to the church John shows a genuine balance and passion for both the truth and love for others. For a church facing schisms from foreign teachings,²⁸ John recommends they rely on the truth that has set them free but only in the context of a voluntary, self-



sacrificing, deep love for each other.²⁹ While brash words of an unloving, self-exalting, hypocritical person cripples the desire of others to hear the truth, love breaks down the barriers of self-justification so that with gentleness, humility and respect removing the planks of sin becomes a reciprocal process of building one another up in the faith! “It is not that love precedes truth or belief, but that love offers the clearest test of the truthfulness of the confession and the sincerity of the obedience

given to God’s commands.”³⁰ “Truth without love has no decency; it’s just *brutality*. On the other hand, love without truth has no character; it’s just *hypocrisy*.”³¹ As can clearly be seen in the above epistle, John learned these lessons well for this “Son of Thunder” rejoiced in God’s people as they walked both in the truth and in love for one other!³²

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Martin H. Manser, [*Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*](#) (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

²⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., 106.

²⁸ Thomas F. Johnson, [*1, 2, and 3 John*](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 148.

²⁹ Thomas F. Johnson,.

³⁰ Glenn W. Barker, 363.

³¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., 106.

³² John F. MacArthur Jr., 107.

Balancing Ambition with Humility

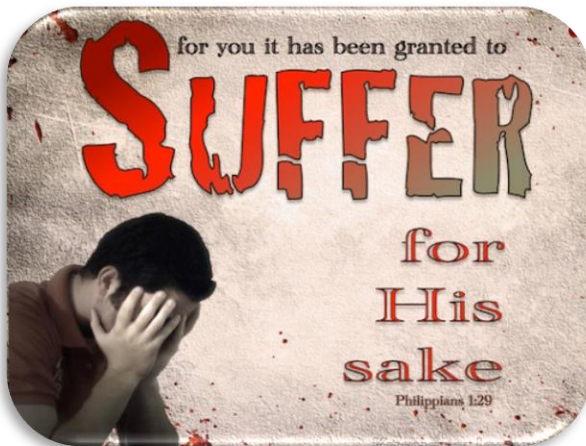
To be truly effective in ministry we learn from John how important it is to balance our ambition with that of humility. Early in his ministry, John and James enlisted their mother



Salome to secretly go to Jesus and ask for the top positions in His kingdom (Matthew 20:20).³³ Should not those who were part of Jesus' inner circle not only get to sit on one of the twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel like the other disciples (Matthew 19:28)³⁴ but also sit on the left and right hand of Jesus (Mark 10:37)? In response to the subsequent dispute that broke out about who was the greatest amongst the disciples, Jesus rebuked them for seeking positions in His kingdom only to lord power over others (Mark 10:42-45). John also got rebuked for having told a

person to stop driving out demons in the name of Jesus merely because he wanted to keep the status of the 12 for themselves (Mark 9:38-41). John learned that "ambition without humility becomes egotism, or even megalomania,"³⁵ for the kingdom of God will not advance through "politics, status, power or dominion" but through serving one other in love!³⁶ John learned this lesson so well that humility became one of his greatest virtues as demonstrated in his refusal to sign his writings as anything but anonymously as the "one whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20).³⁷ Those who have "acquired" their positions of power inside of the church only to lord their positions over others can learn a lot from John's servanthood attitude!

Balancing Glory and Suffering



To effectively serve in God's kingdom John learned that one must be willing to suffer for His name's sake! While it was easy for John to accept a position as one of the twelve disciples, being a judge of one of the twelve tribes of Israel and one who has received the promise of eternal life (Matthew 28:28-30); to suffer for the sake of the kingdom was a cup hard to accept! Likewise, is it not easy for us today to accept being chosen in Christ before the creation of the world to be adopted in His family and to

³³ John F. MacArthur Jr., 109.

³⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., 90.

³⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., 108.

³⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., 110.

³⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., 111.

receive the glorious riches of His abundant grace (Ephesians 1), but quite another thing to receive “fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10)? To be “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” means we must suffer with him so that we may be glorified together with Him (Romans 8:17). While John abandoned Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:50), this “Son of Thunder” participated in Christ’s baptism of suffering (Matthew 20:23) at the foot of the cross (John 19:25-27) and on the Island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). While suffering is far from pleasant, like Apostle Paul one must never forget “the sufferings in this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Conclusion

While there is no one kind of personality that is best to serve God in His kingdom, one should seek a balanced approach to ministry. Since truth without love has no decency; it’s just *brutality* and love without truth has no character; it’s just *hypocrisy*; we are to passionately proclaim the truth concerning God with voluntary, self-sacrificing, deep love for one another. Since “ambition without humility becomes egotism, or even megalomania, we are to serve in the kingdom of God not for positions of power and authority but for the privilege of serving He who adopts and calls us His children. And lastly, those who share in the glorious riches of His abundant grace are to be willing to be baptized unto His suffering. If you have an extreme personality do not worry for He who changed Apostle John to be both a “Son of Thunder” and the “Disciple Jesus Loved” can and will change you if only you ask!