

One Hit Wonders – 2 John

You might be wondering why we're playing the song Monster Mash. Well, two reasons. Halloween is right around the corner, and we are doing Trunk R Treat in the Orscheln's parking lot from 6 to 8 pm. But there's another reason. We're in the middle of a series called *One Hit Wonders*. Monster Mash was a one hit wonder for Bobby Pickett...twice. It climbed the charts both in 1962 and again in 1973.

Are you really a one hit wonder if you have the same hit song more than once? R& B Motown group The Contours hit the charts twice with "Do You Love Me" 1962 and again in 1988. The Surfari's took "Wipeout" to the top ten twice. Ben E. King did it with "Stand by Me." Chubby Checker did it with "The Twist." The Ventures did it with "Walk Don't Run," and Queen did it with "Bohemian Rhapsody."

We're looking at one hit wonders of the Bible— books of the Bible that have only 1 chapter. Two weeks ago we looked at Obadiah in the O.T. and last Sunday we heard the story of Philemon and Onesimus.

We come to two letters today and next week that are hard to call one hit wonders— 2 John and 3 John. Go ahead and open your Bibles or Bible apps to 2 John. It's hard to think of them as one hit wonders when the Apostle John wrote a full 20% of the N.T. We have the Gospel of John. We have 1, 2, and 3 John, and we have the book of Revelation. And John's Gospel and his 3 letters repeat the same message again and again and again. It's like he's climbing the charts multiple times with the same song.

(Read 2 John)

A Son of Thunder Becomes an Apostle of Love

If John were to write a hit song it would be a love song, not a sappy love song like the romantic rubbish that fills our airwaves, but a song championing the worth of true Christian love. It's the same hit song he goes back to again and again. So much so, that John became known as the Apostle of Love.

This is pretty amazing when you consider where John started. He was a rough and tough fisherman and he had a fishing business with his brother James, and the two brothers Peter and Andrew. When Jesus first met John and his brother James they were known for their tempers. They were nicknamed the Sons of Thunder. Sounds like a motorcycle gang, doesn't it.

By the time John writes his several books in the Bible, he's an old man. He calls himself "the elder" in our letter. That's not just a position of authority in the church; it is an indication of his age and seniority. He's likely the oldest and most long-term Christian anyone in the church knows. He's the last of the apostles still alive. He's an elder in every sense of the word. He spent three years with Jesus. He's spent decades growing as a Christian leader. His life has been transformed. The anger has been whittled away. What is left is the Apostle of love.

John's love song first hits the charts in his gospel. In John 13:34-35 he quotes Jesus,

*34 "A new command I give you: **Love** one another. As I have **loved** you, so you must **love** one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you **love** one another."*

John's hit love song tops the charts again in 1 John. He mentions love some 43 times in 5 chapters.

Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. 2:10

For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. – 3.11

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 3:23

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 4:8

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. 4:20-2

Here in 2 John, he mentions love 5 more times in 13 verses. The key reference comes in verse 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.*” I should point out that the “Dear Lady” he’s writing to in this letter is not a person, but it is a church.

The command he is referring to here is the same one mentioned in his gospel, except now it isn’t a new command any longer. This is a command the church has known for 50 years or so. He is reminding them of what they already know. It’s why this letter is so short; it’s a reminder of what’s important.

If John had nothing more to say than “Love one another,” nobody would have a problem with it. Our culture would love John. People would go around wearing tee shirts with quotes from John. Our culture loves the idea of love. We’re in love with love.

The problem is we don’t have a clue what real love is. We confuse sex for love. We confuse desire for love. We confuse romance for love. We confuse warm fuzzy feelings for love. We confuse infatuation for love.

But for John, love is none of those things. Love is not a wishy washy sentiment. Love is not how someone makes you feel. It is not a physical response when the right chemistry happens. Love is not what happens when someone gives you good vibes. Love is the decision to treat someone in the way Jesus would treat them. Love is to behave a certain way toward someone regardless of what they do to you. Regardless of how they make you feel. Emotions have nothing to do with it.

This is where the message of 2 John is so important, because the Apostle John connects love to two things without which love can’t take you anywhere. Picture love as an airplane. Love is the fuselage, the cabin in which we all ride together. But that cabin is never getting off the ground without two wings. The two wings that elevate love and give it flight are truth and obedience.

Love Requires Truth

First of all Love requires truth. Listen to how many times the word truth pops up in the first 4 verses:

1 The elder, To the lady chosen by God and to her children, whom I love in the **truth**—and not I only, but also all who know the **truth**— 2 because of the **truth**, which lives in us and will be with us forever:

3 Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in **truth** and love. 4 It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the **truth**, just as the Father commanded us.

Do you get the impression that the truth is important to John? Our culture has real problems with truth. For a few decades now we have been told that truth is relative. We've been told that truth changes depending on your perspective. Our culture believes and practices a philosophy called relativism. Relativism teaches that there is no such thing as absolute truth. In relativism, each person gets to decide what is true or not true for them.

According to a recent Barna survey, "According to a majority of American adults (57 percent), knowing what is right or wrong is a matter of personal experience." This view becomes more prevalent among younger adults. Three-quarters of Millennials (74 percent) agree strongly or somewhat with the statement, "Whatever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know." What I find truly scary is that 40% of those who claim to be Christians agree with this view.ⁱ

It's not unusual to hear people today say things like, "I've been trying to live my truth lately." "We disagree. Your truth is your truth and my truth is my truth." And people will say these things about questions of fact and reality. They're not just talking about their preference for Coke over Pepsi, or Pepperoni Pizza over Sausage.

That's not how the truth works. You don't get your own truth. Either something is true or it isn't. Either it conforms to reality or it doesn't. A couple of weeks ago I was reading some commentary about the Brett Kavanaugh and Christy Blasey Ford hearings in the senate. I'm not talking about politics here. I'm not getting into who I believe in that fight, but I want you to hear what this commentator had to say.

"I believe that's her truth. And I believe her story, and I have a lot of compassion for what she went through. And I could see it on her face that that is her truth. But I could also see it on Judge Kavanaugh's face that that is his truth."ⁱⁱ

What? They cannot both be telling the truth. They might both be lying. One might be mistaken, while the other is telling the truth. One might be lying, and the other honest, but the one thing they cannot both be is telling the truth.

Our culture has lied to itself and we've tried to convince ourselves that the most loving thing is to let everyone have their own truth. You have your truth and I have my truth. But that's not how truth works. Something is either true or it isn't. It either really happened that way, or it didn't. It really works that way, or it doesn't.

TRUE Love

What John is saying here is that true love must correspond with truth. Love doesn't get off the ground unless it matches with reality, not wishful thinking.

The most loving thing you can do is to give someone the truth. Keeping the truth from someone is not the loving thing to do. This doesn't mean that we wield the truth like a weapon. Our goal is always to speak the truth in love. But the bottom line is that the loving thing is the truthful thing.

We lie to ourselves and think that the loving thing to do is to lie to them- to water down the truth, to redefine the truth, to redraw its lines. But true love requires the truth. Untruth may make them feel better in the short term. It may make the relationship smoother for right now, but on the long road, but untruth is always the path to pain and broken relationships.

Let me give you a simple illustration. Have you ever wrestled with telling someone they have toilet paper sticking out of their pants, their zipper's undone, or they have a booger sticking on the end of their nose. Do I say something and embarrass them? Or do I stay quiet? What is the loving thing to do?

We know that if we say something, they'll be embarrassed. If we don't say anything they'll go on blissfully unaware, and we won't be the bearer of bad news. But at some point, they will discover it on their own. Someone will tell them, and they will wonder, "How long has my zipper been down? How many people saw me, spoke to me, but didn't care enough to say something, but instead let me go on looking like an idiot. We know that if it was us, we'd want someone to say something immediately. Not telling them the truth may make you both feel better in the short term, but in the long run, the truth is the loving thing to do.

Now when it comes to matters of moral truth and spiritual truth, questions of right and wrong, the stakes are much higher than just a booger on the end of your nose or some spinach caught in your teeth.

To love others, we must be lovers of the truth. John takes it even further later in the letter. To love others, we must guard against untruth.

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[a] 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.

One of the things they were fighting in the early church was this false teaching called Gnosticism. Gnostics taught that they had secret or special knowledge that wasn't available in the church at large. Only from them could you learn these deeper mysteries.

John's warning is that love can't be an excuse to tolerate untruth, because this untruth was a threat to their very souls. This false teaching didn't correspond with reality. It wasn't truth. If they were to allow this untruth into their midst, they could lose what they had in Christ.

Notice how John's message here is opposite of our culture. Our culture says, the loving thing is to be tolerant of all sorts of ideas. John says the loving thing is to be intolerant of untruth. He says, "Watch out!" Be on guard. Keep watch and defend the truth.

Don't turn a blind eye to these antichrists. So many in the church are afraid of THE Antichrist, when John says there are already antichrists all over the place. Guard against them. John says if their teaching doesn't with what Jesus teaches, don't let them in your church, don't even let them in your house. You are exposing yourself to danger.

The loving thing is not to say, "Sure, come on in. Have a seat. I can at least listen to what you have to say." No, John says, by doing so you may be sharing in their wicked work. It is so easy to get sucked into untruth.

Some application of this is obvious. If some cult group such as the Jehovah's witnesses come knocking on your front door, you don't invite them in. You don't talk to them. You don't hear them out. You don't take their literature. Now, be polite. Don't be mean and rude, but you make no allowance for untruth.

But lies don't always come knocking on your front door. Lies come through our cable and satellite dishes. They come through our DSL lines into our computers. They come over WiFi into our smartphones. They arrive in our mailboxes. One question we need to ask ourselves this morning is, is there any way I am inviting untruth into my house and my life? Maybe it's time for your guard to go up, because love requires truth.

Love requires obedience

So truth is the first wing that makes love fly. The second wing that gives flight to love is obedience. If love must correspond with truth, then our lives must correspond with truth— and that's obedience.

For many, the words love and obedience sound like opposites. One is soft; the other hard. They don't sound like they belong in the same conversation together. Obedience is not a positive word these days.

But obedience is the second verse of John's hit love song.

He quotes Jesus in John 15:10 *"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love"* (15:10).

John in 1 John 5:3 *"For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments."* John actually defines love as obedience.

And what does he say here in 2 John. Look at verse 6: *"And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands."*

When he says walk in obedience he means step by step with each thing we do, we obey what God calls us to do. We can't claim to love oh so much, and then go out and keep doing whatever the heck it is we want to do. Ultimately, love is not possible without surrendering our will to His will.

Someone counted that there are 1,642 commands in the N.T. Jesus makes very clear that a tangible way we have to express our love for him is to obey, his commands. Our love is not proven when we stand and sing in church about how much we love Jesus. It's not proven by the Christian tee shirts we wear or the Christian memes we post on Facebook. We demonstrate our love for God when we do what he says.

I want to give you two reasons why love and obedience must go together. First obedience insures that we are doing the loving thing.

Obedience Insures We Are Doing the Loving Thing

And it isn't just our love for God that's tied to obedience. John makes the point here that our love for one another is also directly tied to obedience. Put the end of verse 5 and the beginning of verse 6 together, *"I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands."*

How do we love each other? By obeying his commands. The way we know what the loving thing to do is, is by asking what does God's Truth say? What does God say to do? When we obey that command, when we act in accordance with that truth, we have done the loving thing.

If you want to love your brother or sister in Christ, you need to obey Him. When we disobey, we will inevitably end up doing the unloving thing to someone else.

Remember, every time God commands you to do a certain thing, he is asking you to do the loving thing. It's isn't just the right thing to do, it is the loving thing to do. Loving doesn't mean doing what the other person wants. It doesn't mean what we want. It doesn't mean what feels good. Love is what builds another person up. Love is what benefits them in the long run.

Love is the Highest Motivator for Obedience

A second reason love and obedience need to be tied together is because love is the highest and best motivation for obedience. We might obey out of fear. We might obey out of guilt. We might obey out of a sense of duty, but all of those motivations will fail at some point.

If fear is my motivator, then when I don't think I will get caught, I won't obey. If guilt is my driving force, what happens when my conscience gets worn down? If it is my sense of duty, what do I do if no one is looking? But if I am moved by love, then none of those things matter, because I will do the right thing because I want to.

A working mother returned home one wintry day to discover the driveway cleared of snow, the rugs vacuumed, and the dishes washed and put away. She had not left all these things on her list of chores. "What got into you?" the amazed mother asked her children. "We just wanted to show you we love you, Mom," was their answer. Obeying out of love takes the burden out of doing what God requires. And so we see that love and obedience are intimately intertwined.

ⁱ Barna Group, "Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings," 12 February 2002

ⁱⁱ <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-friday-edition-1.4842602/that-s-her-truth-kavanaugh-supporter-says-of-christine-blasey-ford-s-testimony-1.4842608>