

Walking in Truth 2 John

Introduction:

The apostle John was very passionate about two things: love and truth. In his first letter he emphasized love primarily. He showed us that “God is love,” and revealed how God expressed that love first and foremost in Jesus Christ. In that letter, however, John also says a lot about the truth. In fact, the word “truth” appears in every chapter of 1 John and will be the main focus of 2 John.

In a time and culture in which love has come to mean any fuzzily defined positive feeling, John’s healthy focus on the truth is a welcome change. There is such a thing as truth and we find it in Jesus. There are also swindlers who have gone out into the world, who deny some basic doctrines about Christ. John calls them deceivers and antichrists.

Paul dealt with a similar problem.

Titus 1:10-11 ¹⁰For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.

So John was not alone in dealing with this problem. It was a problem that was rampant in the days of the early church. Things have only gotten worse in our time.

Currently, the word “love” has become almost meaningless. What 2 John can help us with is learning to put boundaries on our love. Love doesn’t mean we let people do or say anything they want to and consider it Christian. Love is not manipulative or false. Love’s boundaries are defined by the truth.

Love must always be grounded in truth; the truth allows us to express love in its truest form.

Outline:

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- II. We have to walk in the truth. 1:4-6
- III. We have to abide in the truth. 1:7-11
- IV. Final Greetings. 1:12-13

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I. **We have to love in truth.** 1:1-3

1:1 **elder** John is writing to people who accept his apostolic authority, so he doesn't need to make a big deal of being an apostle. Instead he puts himself at the level of being an "old man" or an elder in the church – a pastoral figure. Peter referred to himself in the same way.

1 Peter 5:1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

The elect lady and her children Some people say this is an individual, which is certainly the simplest reading of it. Most Bible students opt for the idea that John is writing this letter to a church. Perhaps the solution is that a Christian assembly was meeting in this home, along with the family of the "elect lady," so that John had both the family and the congregation in mind.

Truth For John, the truth is a primary issue. He uses the word 20 times in three short letters. Four of those times are in the three verses of this greeting.

Truth is reality – or that which corresponds to reality. A statement is true if it corresponds to that which actually is. The truth as a concept is that which is ultimately real.

Jesus tells us that **He** is the truth (John 14:6) and that **God's Word** is truth (John 17:17). He calls the **Holy Spirit** "the Spirit of truth." (John 14:16-17, 16:13)

1:2 **The truth abides (lives) in us and will be with us forever** John is reminding us that knowing the truth is a deeply personal experience. Christ dwells within us – an experience which permanently changes our lives.

To know the truth, on the one hand, is to agree with certain basic Christian doctrines – it will never be less than that. But it is supposed to be more than that. It is the personal experience of knowing Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth.

1:3 **Grace** is receiving favor from God that we don't deserve.

Mercy is not receiving the judgment we do deserve.

Ephesians 2:4-5 ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

When we receive God's grace and mercy, which flow out of his love for us, it leads to his **peace**. Experiencing peace with God leads to receiving the peace of God.

John connects all five concepts here: grace, mercy, peace, truth and love.

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II. We have to walk in the truth. 1:4-6

- 1:4 Since John **rejoiced greatly**, I don't believe John is implying that "only some" of the lady's children were walking in truth. He is simply pointing out that he has interacted with some of these – probably people from that church – who were sticking to the essentials of the faith.

It is the Christian's unavoidable duty to walk in the truth. There can be no option about this; it is the main ingredient of our discipleship. The truth of God, revealed supremely in the living Word, and recorded unerringly in the written Word, provides the route by which the Christian is travelling from earth to heaven. – David Jackman

- 1:5 Jesus said it first, that we should love one another. This is a theme John loves to repeat.

- 1:6 When we separate obedience from love, it hardens into an oppressive duty. It becomes an unhealthy, ritualistic keeping of rules. When this happens we eventually lose our desire to serve God and are tempted to give up.

In a right relationship to God, our Christianity is motivated by love for God. When that is true, we find, as John did, that "his commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

Love for the Father and the Son makes obedience anything but confining. Rather than duty it becomes the most natural joyful response to a God who loved us first. Love makes duty a joy.

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III. We have to abide in the truth. 1:7-11

- 1:7 Alas, not everyone remains faithful to the truth. Some of those who severed their fellowship with John were now taking on a missionary attitude. They were spreading their false teaching to others and actively looking to make converts to their false beliefs.

There were a couple of different false teachings about Christ that we know of from that day. One of them believed that Jesus was something like a spirit being that didn't really have a fully human nature at all. Another believed that Jesus was a normal man, but that the Christ-spirit descended upon him at his baptism and left him at or just before the crucifixion. In other words the divine Christ could not experience a physical human death. David Jackman sums it up nicely:

What John wants to establish is that the Word, which once became flesh, is still flesh and always will be; that the Christ who has ascended to the majesty of the Father is, at one and the same time, the human Jesus. There is a glorified man in heaven. The effect of the deceivers' teaching was to deny that the divine and human natures were united in the one person within the womb of the virgin Mary, never to be separated. Anyone making such a denial is antichrist, because it strikes at the very basis of Christ's person and work, on which the Christian faith is built.

1:8 But our reward is dependent upon our abiding in the truth. Lose the truth, lose the reward.

As far as John is concerned, the truth is knowable and is not optional.

1:9 John clarifies the problem. The danger here is that we go beyond the limits of the Word of God and add new things to it. The word translated “transgress” means “to run ahead too far, to pass beyond the assigned limits.” It is false progress! Warren Wiersbe explains:

The apostates like to make us believe that they are “progressive” while the church is “in a rut.” They invite us to join them because they have something “new and exciting” to share. But their “progress” is such that they abandon the doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Son of God come in the flesh.

Let’s be clear: Neither new ideas nor old traditions are right or wrong in themselves. They all have to be brought to Scripture and tested by the standard of truth.

Fashions and fads tend to make pendulum swings back and forth as one movement reacts to another. Our responsibility is to discover the straight biblical way and judge all teaching and practice by the Bible’s unchanging truth. Going farther than that is not progress; it is apostasy.

1:10-11 In those days most of the Christian meetings were held in homes. If this letter is to a church, or to a lady who hosted a church in her home, then we can see where John is going with this section:

- To take the stranger in would mean to accept his teaching and to welcome him into the fellowship of the church like other travelling teachers.
- Greeting him, as John says, would similarly mean more than a simple formality. It would be to express that there was a connection between the two of them. The lady would be expressing joy in his arrival, implying that there was a depth of friendship or relationship. There are several things wrong with this:
 - Inviting the deceiver into the fellowship not an expression of Christian love. It is more akin to spiritual suicide.
 - It does not show love to the rest of the flock, because it exposes them to heresy which can eventually undermine their faith.
 - It does not show love towards the deceiver. Rather, it confirms him in his error, when what he needs is serious correction. And if he didn’t receive this from John, the last living apostle of the Lord, it is unlikely he would receive it from anyone else.
 - Finally, hospitality extended toward deceivers in this context does not express love for God. It sides with evil which is actively encouraging the spread lies.

OT Illustration: In the OT, there was a good king of Judah named Jehoshaphat who allied himself by marriage with the evil king Ahab of Israel. Jehoshaphat went into battle with Ahab – a battle in which Ahab was killed.

2 Chronicles 19:1-2 ¹*Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem.*
²*And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you.”*

John was concerned that this lady – or church – would find themselves aiding the enemies of God. This would not be an expression of Christian love, but the height of foolishness.

IV. Final Greetings 1:12-13

1:12-13 John closes by expressing a desire to visit this church and see them face to face. Both occurrences of the word “you” in v.12 are plural – so John is talking to the group here.

When we were living overseas and involved in mission work I used to say, “A picture may be worth a thousand words, but a visit is worth a thousand pictures.”

We could send newsletters and pictures all the time, but when people who came to visit, they were often the ones who shared the greatest heart for our work and we felt most closely tied to them.

John has a personal affection for this church and nothing he says in a letter can match a visit to them.

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Conclusions:

In a time and culture in which love has come to mean any fuzzily defined positive feeling, John’s healthy focus on the truth is a welcome change. There is such a thing as truth and we find it in Jesus. There are also swindlers who have gone out into the world, who deny some basic doctrines about Christ. John calls them deceivers and antichrists. This may sound harsh, but if we allow the truth to be compromised then the church loses its foundation. Our love would no longer be grounded in truth.

- We need to love people in truth. In other words, there are ways to love that correspond with reality, that do not compromise our Christian faith – in beliefs or in actions. This is how we are to love. There are also ways to love that do not correspond to reality, which reveal a fuzzy understanding of love – and perhaps an equally fuzzy understanding of the Christian faith.

- We have to walk in the truth. This means simply that our behavior needs to match our beliefs. This means abandoning all forms of hypocrisy.
 - The other day I was with some people (from another church, thankfully) and one of them used some bad language. Another of them reminded that person that I was a pastor. This is disturbing, for it seems to imply that it would be fine to use such language around other people, just not around me.
- If we have to behave one way around “Christians,” especially pastors, then we are engaging the purest form of hypocrisy. We are “acting” or pretending to be someone we are not. This is the opposite of walking in the truth.
- We have to abide in the truth. This has an impact on what some might call “Christian unity.” Many people rightly lament all the division that seems to be present in Christianity. Still, not all division is bad, as John has shown us here. There are plenty of churches that claim to be Christian and are not in fact any such thing. Some of these started out wrong; others have drifted from the truth over time. In either case, it would be wrong to be too closely tied to them, because it would be impossible to be closely tied without compromising our own beliefs.
- What do we do when nice people come to our door bringing teaching that amounts to another Jesus – one different from the Jesus the Bible conveys? The most loving thing may be to explain to them why their view is wrong. To do that you may have to do some homework comparing the beliefs of various groups with biblical Christianity. If you are not prepared to do that, you may have to just shut the door.
- We may also have to turn off those “Christian” TV programs, as they are often the worst examples of the Christian faith on offer and they give us no chance to respond.
- Christian love looks out for the spiritual safety of others. John wrote this letter because he was concerned that wrong teaching and false teachers would find their way into this lady’s community. He wrote this letter as a warning motivated by love. He wanted to protect these precious believers. We will do the same, and look out for others, especially our children or those who are newer in the faith. We will try to guide them into right beliefs and set an example for them in right behavior.