

Truth and Love

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Ash, and thank you to our musicians and singers for leading us in praise.! Let me pray and ask for God's help as we look at these verses in John's second letter together.

Thank you, God, for your word. We thank you that it is spirit-inspired, and so we hear you speaking to us when we read it.

And so we pray today that we would hear your voice, and that by your spirit you would shape and change our lives, that we would be the people that you call us to be. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, Frank Sinatra, O Blue Eyes, used to sing about love and marriage. You know how the song goes. I'm not going to sing it to you, but these are the lyrics. Love and marriage, love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage.

This I tell you, brother, you can't have one without the other. Of course, we all know that in theory, love and marriage should and ought to go together, but we know in practice, sadly, that this is not always the case.

[1 : 37] We just read to John where John writes about how love and truth go together. And we know in theory they should, they ought to, but also, sadly, they don't always go together.

But John's writing, and he wants love and truth to go together in the life of every single believer, but also in the life of every single church. And yet we know that this is not always the case in our own lives, nor in church.

And so John is writing, really, to urge his readers to continue in love and truth, to have a clear expression of love for one another as people in a church, but also to have a firm embrace of the truth, to know the truth and to let it shape their lives together.

Because in real, genuine, authentic Christianity, love and truth coexist with one another. They are interconnected. And you should know that if you are a believer.

And John is urging us, as we see from both of these letters, he's urging us to be walking in the truth. Walking in the truth. A phrase which comes up in both of these letters.

[2 : 55] That's why we've given our series, Walk in the Truth. And that's what we need to do if we are a follower of Jesus, is walk in the truth. But if you're curious about Christianity, and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, and you're here today, you may be wondering what it is all about, what it means to be a Christian or to live as a Christian.

Well, 2 John and 3 John help us to see that. And so today we're going to look at two simple points. First of all, Christianity expresses love. And then secondly, Christianity embraces truth.

Christianity expresses love and embraces truth. But before we look at these two points, let me just give a few introductory comments to this letter. So first of all, if you look at verse 1, we read the elder to the lady chosen by God and to her children.

So John, the author, simply identifies himself as the elder. Now this is the apostle John, but he identifies in terms of his pastoral role, his care and love for the flock that he's writing to.

And he's writing to the lady chosen by God, or some translations would say the elect lady and her children. Now this could be a real Christian woman, or the lady could refer to the church.

[4 : 16] And the church members would be her children. And this imagery, of course, you know if you read the Bible, is common in the Old Testament. So Israel, God's people, are often referred to in female terms.

And then when you get to the New Testament, we speak of Christ and his bride, the church, where the church is referred to in female terms. And so in 2 John, it's more likely that John is referring to the lady as the church and her children as its members.

And this really makes best sense as we read the letter itself. So what is the background to the letter? Well, John is warning the church. He says in verse 7, many deceivers who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh have gone out into the world. So there are some false teachers around, and they are denying that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, took on human flesh, human nature.

They didn't believe Jesus was fully God and fully man, which is a central truth to Christianity. And so these false teachers were dangerous and needed to be rejected.

[5 : 29] And that's why John's concern is that the church hold on to the truth, the truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ. They had to do it then.

And we still need to, as the church today, hold on to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is God come into this world in the flesh to save us.

And that is the great message of hope for our world. Anything else is not good news. It is not the message of Christianity. So let's look then, first of all, at how Christianity expresses love.

And then we'll think secondly of how Christianity embraces truth. So first, Christianity expresses love. Just look down at your Bible and notice how many times John repeats the word love in this short letter.

Now, of course, love is a word that is common today. It gets bandied about loads. And our culture generally understands love as a feeling. It's an emotion.

[6 : 35] And so it can come and it can go. But the love that John speaks about here is altogether different. And so there are three things that we can see about this love.

Three things. First, love flows from truth. Second, love is commanded. And then third, love means obedience. So let's look first at love flowing from truth.

Verse 1 to 3. 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 because of the truth which lives in us and will be with us forever.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son will be with us in truth and love. Okay, so John's opening words here express love.

And that would be a love for the people that he is writing to. But where does this love come from? Well, he says it flows from truth. So John says to his readers that they are those whom I love in truth.

[7 : 44] And that is the truth about Jesus. The one who is the truth. And it's this truth, the truth about Jesus, that unites them as a church in love for one another.

In other words, the basis of their love for each other is Jesus Christ. It's the truth they believe about him. And it's this truth about Jesus Christ that not only brings them together and unites them together, but it's what will keep them together.

And so, you know, we don't love one another in church because we are naturally drawn to each other. We don't love each other because we are lovely. You're looking at me and I'm looking at you. But we love each other because we are united to Jesus Christ. And so we are therefore united to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

We're not united because we share a common interest, which is the case for other clubs or societies. People come together because they like playing the trombone or they play hockey or whatever it is.

[8 : 54] No, the love that John is talking about here is grounded in truth. The truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That love flows from this truth.

And so it's a truth that will keep us together as different and as diverse as we are. So love that is not based on this truth, the truth about Jesus Christ, isn't really Christian love.

It's nothing more than mere sentimentality. Because what unites the church of Jesus Christ is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

And the truth is the apostolic gospel message of Jesus. So real, genuine, authentic love can never come at the expense of truth.

People in a church can't really love one another deeply and truly if they have moved away from the truth of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[9 : 57] So that's the first thing. Love flows from truth. Second, love is commanded. Verse 5, what does it say? 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. So he's saying love is not an optional extra for certain people in the church. Like some have the gift of making tea and coffee or welcoming people or discipling people and others have this gift of love.

No, he's saying here this is for all of God's people. Not just the touchy-feely people who express their love in a visible way. John makes it clear that this is a command for everybody.

And it's not a new command either that he's giving. Loving one another is basic to Christianity.

Why? Because this is a command of Jesus Christ himself.

Jesus said to his disciples shortly before his death, My command is this, love each other as I have loved you. From John 15.

[11 : 02] And so we must love each other because Jesus says so. It's as simple as that. And I'm sure we often need to be reminded to do this, don't we?

Interestingly, the Apostle John, he had to keep reminding Christians as he grew older to love one another. And church history records John when he was too old to preach or even stand.

John would be carried into the church assembly when they had a worship service. And with a feeble voice, it said that John would say the words, Little children, love one another.

Every week, every time they met, little children, love one another. So loving one another is a command from Jesus. And so it must be obeyed by each of us.

We're to love because we belong to Jesus. Okay, love flows from truth. Love is commanded. And then third, love means obedience. Verse 6.

[12 : 05] 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.

So loving and obedience and truth, they're all connected almost in a circular kind of motion. So love here is simply to walk in obedience to God's commands.

And what is his command? John says his command is that you walk in love. And again, this comes from Jesus, doesn't it? Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commands.

And again, Jesus said, if you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. And so love means obedience.

Love and obedience cannot be separated or pulled apart. Love has an ethical and a practical dimension to it. Which means, when we put it into practice, if there's no desire in our hearts to really want to obey God's commands and to please God and to glorify God with our lives, then it's surely an indication that we don't really love him.

[13 : 22] Because if we love him, then we will want to obey him. Now it might seem that we've kind of spoiled love a bit by digging down into what John is saying here in his description of love.

It might seem that John has made love sound less loving than it actually is or should be. Because he's saying, well, love flows from truth.

That sometimes makes love sound hard, doesn't it? He's saying that love is commanded. Well, that makes love sound a bit harsh, doesn't it?

And love means obedience. Well, that makes love sound a bit cold and dispassionate to our ears, doesn't it? But that's not the love that John is talking about here.

He's talking about loving God and loving people. With a love that is more than simply affection. It is love that is active and it is practical.

[14 : 23] It is love that does good to others. For example, verse 6, if love is walking in obedience to God's commands, then we are not really loving people if we affirm them in every single thing that they choose to do.

Especially if their chosen lifestyle involves disobeying God. And so in our culture, we'd say, you do you. It's saying, you be true to yourself.

You do whatever you feel. Don't worry about what other people think about you. And it all sounds really loving, doesn't it? I mean, who would want to argue against somebody doing what they want to do?

But in reality, loving someone, really loving someone, doesn't mean giving them a free pass to behave however they want to behave.

Especially if their behavior is destructive. Especially if their behavior is wrecking their lives. You don't just say, you do you. If you really love them, then you will try and help them see the error of their ways.

[15 : 32] In fact, it's the most unloving thing we could ever do. It's just to leave somebody to wreck their lives and to disobey God. And so we'll love better the better we know the truth.

Can you see how the love and the truth go together? They are connected. We need both love and truth. And John is teaching that both love and truth go together.

They always do. And they should never be separated for the Christian or for the church. And we're going to see this as he tackles the false teaching that was threatening the church.

Okay, so Christianity expresses love. That's our first point. The second is Christianity embraces truth. So besides love, I wonder if you notice how many times John repeats the word truth.

He says it a lot. Because every believer and every church should be not just characterized by love, but also characterized by truth.

[16 : 35] Because in real, genuine, authentic Christianity, love and truth are inseparably interlinked. Because as John writes here, he is concerned about these false teachers who may influence the church.

And so despite this emphasis on love amongst one another within the church, John is also saying that you must reject the false teachers. They are not to be welcomed.

So John wants the church to be clear on the truth of the message of Jesus. Because when you're clear on the truth of the message of Jesus and others come in, and they oppose that message, then you can't stand to have them around.

So there are three aspects of this truth that we need to be clear on. And they're on the screen. First, the truth is practical. Second, the truth is rejected.

And then third, truth rejecters must be rejected. So first, the truth is practical. Notice what gives John great joy here in verse 4. It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commands us.

[17 : 44] So the word walking here basically refers to their lifestyle. So the truth that they believed made a practical difference to how they lived their lives on a day-to-day basis.

Remember, God's people obey him by living his way. God's people love him by obeying him. So John uses the words father and children to emphasize this, because children should do what their father tells them.

When the father gives the child a command, then the child is to obey it. There's not really any option or negotiation. The command is to be obeyed.

And so it's this walking in the truth that causes John to rejoice. And he's expressing the joy that every elder feels, every church leader feels when they see people walking in the truth.

It's so encouraging to see people walking in the truth. And so discouraging when people don't walk in the truth. In fact, it's heartbreaking to see people walking away from the truth and going their own way instead of God's way.

[18 : 57] And here in John, it's this walking in the truth that is actually the antidote to being deceived by false teaching. Because those who either aren't convinced of the truth, they're not sure about the truth, or those who aren't walking in the truth, they're not obeying God, then they will be easy prey for false teachers.

So notice here that John says he found some walking in the truth, verse 4. Now whether this suggests some were walking in the truth and some weren't walking in the truth, or that he's simply talking about those he's aware of, they're the ones who are walking in the truth, perhaps not everyone he's writing to was walking in the truth.

And so it's worth highlighting the warning for us here, isn't it? Because you can be part of a church and yet fail to be walking in the truth.

Being in a church no more means that you're walking in the truth than being in a garage means that you are a working car. You could be a car that sits there, looks good, shiny, seems okay, it's fine on the outside, and yet there can be all sorts of problems under the bonnet.

And so we must walk in the truth and love other people enough to help them walk in the truth as well. That's what John is saying here.

[20 : 29] So the truth, first of all, is practical. Second, the truth is rejected. So people reject the truth. They don't like it. So these false teachers were threatening the church, and see what John says, verse 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.

So the false teachers had gone out into the world. Sounds like missionaries. And yet they were doing anti-mission work because they were denying the truth about Jesus.

And John tells us specifically what they were denying. They were saying that Jesus did not take on a human nature and become a man. And it's this denial of this fundamental truth about who Jesus is that makes them antichrist.

That's why John says, any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. And so whatever these people were teaching, John makes it clear that they are not friends of Jesus.

[21 : 42] They are enemies of Jesus. And whether these people realized it or not, they were doing the devil's work for him. And so even if they claimed to be Christian, even if they were really nice people, even if they did say some things that were good, John is saying he didn't teach the truth about Jesus.

Now, of course, there are still plenty deceivers around today. There always have been. And so we shouldn't be surprised. Jesus himself told us to watch out for these people, just as John does here. So he says, watch out, verse eight, that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Now, the thought here, I think, is not that believers are going to lose their salvation, but of the good work that's been done in the church being lost.

Whether by John or by other teachers, the concern seems to be that their gospel work would be in vain if these false teachers were welcomed into the church.

But it wouldn't just be the leaders who would suffer loss. John's readers would suffer loss too if they embraced this false teaching. And so what John is saying here is that the church needs to hold the line on the truth about Jesus.

[23 : 12] If people are to hear the truth that leads to salvation, then they must reject everything that is false. Because they will not only lose the good work that has been done, but coming generations will turn away from the truth too.

Don Carson, who's a biblical scholar, says this. He says, the first generation has the gospel, the second generation assumes the gospel, and the third generation loses the gospel.

And that's why we must hold on to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ today, in our generation, for the sake of our children, and also their children, our grandchildren.

Because what John is saying here really is, it's not just about differences of opinion in the church, which is what many people think, or having different perspectives on human sexuality, or the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, or other religions, or whatever it is.

It's not about different perspectives. It is about truth and lies, about being for Christ, or being anti-Christ. Listen to John's words, verse 9.

[24 : 28] Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God. He does not have God. Whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

Hear what John's saying here? It's stark. Those who don't continue in the teaching of Christ, the teaching we find in the gospels, and in the Bible, but run ahead, they don't have God.

Now perhaps these false teachers in John's day believed that they were advanced thinkers, and they had moved on from the basics about Jesus. They thought perhaps that they were progressive, and they had an enlightened understanding of Christianity that was far better for people, and that's what they were teaching.

Put it this way. They thought they moved on from the standard driving lessons that you get to the advanced driving course. But no matter how advanced they thought their driving was, their advanced driving course was not approved by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency.

In other words, because they did not continue in the teaching of Jesus Christ, but had moved beyond it, they were simply deceiving themselves, and they were in the danger of deceiving other people.

[25 : 50] And so no matter how Christian such people might seem or sound, John says they don't have God. If they're teaching something that is different from what you find in the teaching of Jesus in the Bible, they don't have God.

I find it so fascinating that these days, false teaching is generally seen as being progressive, where false teachers regard themselves as being enlightened.

They're people who have come to a much better understanding of the Bible's teaching. But somehow, for centuries, everybody else has just somehow missed.

And so false teachers often sneer at those who hold to traditional Christian belief or what the Bible teaches and regards such people as being narrow-minded and out of touch with people and how people live their lives today.

And so false teachers often say things like, well, we don't believe in those old-fashioned interpretations of the Bible anymore. Or the Holy Spirit is leading us today to new understandings of these things in the ancient texts.

[27 : 09] or we just don't listen to the scriptures, but we listen to our hearts and our feelings instead. And that's what leads us to the truth. And whether this comes from professing Christians or whether it comes from leaders in churches or whether it comes from denominations, John says it is all a departure from the teaching of Christ.

It is to move away from his teaching and proves that they do not know God. John's essentially saying if you don't continue in the teachings of Christ, you move yourself right out of Christianity altogether.

And so he says, on the other hand, whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. So John's saying you can't have God without accepting the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you don't accept the teaching that Christ has given, you can't have God. So the truth is rejected. And then third, the truth rejecters must be rejected in verse 10 and 11.

Let's read those verses. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them.

[28 : 33] Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work. So John is urging his readers to reject false teachers. Have nothing to do with them. Don't welcome them into your home and show them hospitality.

Don't hand them the mic in church. Have nothing to do with them. Reject them. Hang on, John. Wait, what? He just told us to be loving. Why should we reject them?

Haven't you got that right or wrong? Well, John says, the end of verse 11, any association with these people means sharing in their wicked work.

So it would not be loving to welcome them, would it, if their work is wicked. In fact, welcoming them would be the most unloving thing that you could possibly do.

Because if they are deceivers and they are anti-Christ, then why would you want other people to be exposed to all of their lies and their false teaching?

[29 : 33] That's why John is saying you should not try to coexist with false teachers in the church. You shouldn't think there's just one big umbrella and some people think this and some people think this and it's okay, it doesn't really matter what you think as long as you're happy and as long as you're loving.

No, John is saying there is truth to be believed and there are lies that are being spread. So don't believe the lies either then or now. Because when you think about it, there is either God revealed truth which saves people like us from sin and death and hell or there are man-made lies that deceive and send people to hell.

So it's no wonder that John's words here are so strong because we don't want to be involved in leading people to hell. That is never, ever loving.

That's why false teaching and false teachers must be rejected. John says it's wicked. So Christianity embraces truth. Christianity expresses love, first of all, and Christianity embraces truth. So if you wind this up, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then belonging to the church of Jesus Christ means walking in truth and love.

[31 : 01] There's no other way because that is the way of Jesus himself. And John should know this because when Jesus came in flesh, who was one of his disciples, his followers, who followed him in his earthly ministry?

It was John, the apostle. And so he could see truth and love perfectly combined in the person of Jesus. Truth and love were simultaneously displayed in the life of Jesus and in the teaching of Jesus.

And yet more than that, truth and love were supremely displayed on the cross of Jesus. Because the cross tells us the truth about ourselves.

And what is the truth about ourselves? The truth is that we are sinners. We are separated from God and we deserve his condemnation for the way that we have rebelled against him.

So the cross tells us the truth about ourselves. But the cross also tells us about the great love of God. The amazing love that he has for us.

[32 : 12] Because God sent Jesus in the flesh as a human being to die for us. And so Jesus could take the punishment we deserve for our sins so that we can be welcomed into the family of God as his beloved children.

Jesus is the only way sinful human beings like you and me can be reconciled to a holy God. That's why Jesus had to come in the flesh.

That's why John is so against those who would teach that Jesus didn't come as God in human flesh. Because the truth of who Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man is fundamental to Christianity.

And if you lose this truth you lose Christianity. And if you lose this truth about Jesus then there is no hope for any of us. No hope for our world.

And yet the amazing truth is that God has come in the flesh to save people like you and me because he loves us. And that's why we have got to turn away from our sin and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as our saviour.

[33 : 31] Because it's only in knowing Christ that we embrace truth and express love as we should. And so think of it this way.

If we claim to know the truth but fail to love we really show we don't know the truth. And if we claim to love but fail to hold on to the truth then we show we don't really love.

We just delude ourselves and we deceive others. Truth and love belong together. And so even if we speak the truth yet fail to speak the truth in a loving way people will reject the truth because we're not very loving.

And if we show love but fail to speak the truth people won't be rescued from hell because we're not telling them the truth that comes from Jesus.

So know the truth and walk in love for your sake but also for the sake of others. Let's pray. Thank you.