

Truth and Love in Troubled Times

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[0 : 00] Well, let's read once again this time from 2 John, and we're going to turn to look at this passage briefly today. The second letter of John, we'll read through it first of all, and then look at some of the main points that arise from it.

The elder to the elect lady and her children whom I love in truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever.

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.

Now I ask you, dear lady, not as though I were writing a new commandment to you, but one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments.

This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world. Those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

[1 : 14] Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God.

Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, or give him any greeting.

For whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

The children of your elect sister greet you. We pray that God will guide us through looking at this short letter as we turn to look at its teaching now.

It's interesting the way the letter begins. As you very well know and sure, it's been in the past by various commentators suggested that John is not writing to a specific individual, but perhaps to a group of believers, to a church, and that he calls the church the elect lady and her children, for reasons known to himself, but probably because at that time it was dangerous to confess yourself publicly as a Christian, or to come to be part of a Christian gathering.

[2 : 43] And so that's why some commentators take the view that this is written to a select group of believers who are facing difficult, hard times. We could take it, of course, as well that it's to a specific lady, a specific woman, and her family, her immediate family, that John is writing to them.

And it doesn't really much matter what we make of those suggestions. The important thing is we look at the contents of the letter itself and realize that they have much to teach us for our circumstances today.

And indeed, it's relevant, as all truth is, for every generation of human beings in this world. And as you can see from the letter, the framework of the letter is very much built around verse 3, where you find grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

And these words, in truth and love, that's what John then takes in the rest of this little letter and builds a framework upon that, if you like, as his foundation.

The truth and love that he mentions there from God is something that he works through in the way that he seeks to guide these Christians into how they themselves should live.

[4 : 03] So there are three things, really, we could say that we can see him emphasizing throughout the letter. He talks, first of all, about walking in the truth. He then speaks about walking

in love.

And it's always interesting in John how you get truth and love and other important concepts like that woven together, interchanged, just as you find here.

So he talks on the one hand, walking in truth. On the other hand, he's relating to that walking in love. And then finally, bringing all that together, we could say that he's calling upon them and upon us through this to be watchful in truth and in love.

He's saying then, verse 8, watch yourselves, take heed to yourselves, that you may not lose what we have worked for, but will win or reach a full reward.

So these three things, very briefly, first of all, walking in the truth. In verse 4, he says, I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.

[5 : 07] Now, every Christian life and every Christian grouping or church that follow the Lord Jesus Christ sincerely are grounded in the truth.

That's what we find in verse 1. They are to the elect lady and her children whom I love in truth. Not only I, but all who know the truth because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever.

And if you're really in any doubt as to what he wants to emphasize, you have it in that first verse itself. Truth is really thrown at us three times there for emphasis, just to make it clear that's what the writer is really wanting to focus upon, to focus upon truth, grounded in the truth.

And, of course, truth is not only just foundational to us as Christians. Truth is something that is, of course, basic, if you like, to God himself.

God is truth. And everything we know of as truth, we know it as truth because it has come from God to us. The truth that we know of, the truth that's in the gospel itself, the truth we know of through the Bible, through the written word of God, the truth that we know of in the person of Jesus Christ revealed to us, all of that has come, of course, from God as his revelation to us.

[6 : 28] It's the only way we come to know what truth is in the fact that it has come from God to us. It's actually foundational to God's own being that he is truth, ultimately.

And that truth has been revealed to us, the truth that God is through Jesus Christ. You remember John in his gospel, early on in the gospel, in chapter 1, verse 14, talking about the word, referring there to the Son of God.

The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And it's the dwelling that he talks about there that's full of grace and truth. The word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

You look at Jesus Christ, you see in Jesus Christ a fullness of grace and of truth. And all the way through John's writings, you find that emphasized again and again.

[7 : 34] In other words, what you have to say in response to the way that you find things today in respect to people's views of truth and what is truth. Truth is not relative.

Truth is not determined by the prevailing culture of any generation. Truth is not determined by what people make of life. Truth is not determined by changes in human society so that you find adjustments in what people say is or isn't truth.

Truth is not relative. It's always an absolute. That's where our generation so badly has gone wrong. Not just in the present day, but over many, many years.

Because truth has been regarded as something malleable. Something that can actually be moved around a bit as human thinking changes. And as Christians, we come back to this particular principle that we always hold to that truth is not relative.

Truth is, in fact, an absolute. And people need absolutes. You and I need absolutes in our lives. We need our lives to be based upon the absolute that God himself is and that God's law is and that God's truth is.

[8 : 48] And so John is bringing us to absolutes. He's bringing us to the truth as an absolute from God. An unchanging and something that is not relative to any human context, although it is always relevant.

Being relevant isn't in danger of being something that changes just because we say the truth is an absolute.

An absolute from God is always relevant in every society, for every society. But he talks here about walking in the truth. I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth.

Now, when we take truth as God's absolute to us, revealed truth, the truth that is in Jesus Christ, the truth that is in the gospel, as well as you find Colossians chapter 1 talking there about truth in terms of the gospel being truth.

Here he is saying, I rejoice to find some of your children walking in the truth. Because the Christian life is about conformity to the truth.

[9 : 57] And I know that a lot of people nowadays, when you tell them something like this, they'll think, well, that's just what I don't want. I don't want conformity to a creed. I don't want the kind of life that just rigidly follows a code, that rigidly follows a creed of some kind.

But that's not what the Christian life is like. Yes, we follow the truth as it is in Christ and as it is through the gospel to us, but it doesn't mean we just slavishly follow a set of rules.

That's not what the Christian life is about. As we'll go on to see, it's a matter of love as well as of truth. And the two things are hand in hand. When we here find some of your children mentioned, some of your children walking in the truth, they're doing so because they love the truth.

Because they love the God of truth. It's not something they've just started slavishly doing, as if they're thinking, well, if I follow a certain pathway, God will actually then see me as deserving of his grace and of his salvation and of his mercy.

That's not what it's about, as you well know. Walking in the truth is saying, here is God's truth that he's given to me, and because I love the Lord, I love his truth, and I want my life to be conformed to that truth and to be shaped by that truth.

[11 : 20] And that's why we have no liberty, really, to change the terms of that truth, to live by. Truth is not as I would prefer my life to be. It's as God requires my life to be.

And so when you follow Christ, as John is saying here, we actually walk in the truth. And you notice the emphasis here on rejoicing. I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth. You find the same in the next letter, 3 John, in verse 4 there, you find him saying, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

And that should be a mark of our own lives as well, not just those of us who seek to preach from the truth of God, but also for yourselves. There should be really few things that delight your heart as much as to know that you're walking in the truth of God and to see other people coming to walk in the truth of God.

That's what delighted John the Apostle's heart here. I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth. What gives you greater delight than to find others coming to walk in the truth along with you on the way to heaven?

[12 : 40] That's the delight of his heart. And the other side of it is equally true. When you find people spurning the truth and turning away from the truth and hating the truth, just as much as we take delight in walking in the truth and seeing people walking in truth, so it should grieve us at our heart to find people doing the opposite.

It should hurt us deeply so that we build that into our prayers. And I don't do that any better than you do.

But it should be something for all of us as praying people that we actually take with us into our prayers, rejoicing in the truth for ourselves, rejoicing seeing others walking in the truth, and lamenting the fact and grieving over the fact that as you look out over our society, sadly so many people are hostile to the truth and hate the truth and don't want the truth of God.

And we need to pray that God will bring them to love the truth as he's brought ourselves to love the truth. So he's talking firstly about walking in the truth, but then secondly, he talks about walking in love.

He talks here about walking in love as much as in the truth. This is love, he says in verse 6, that we walk according to his commandments.

[14 : 16] This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. It's always been for John a distinguishing mark of a Christian that they love God, but they also love one another.

You only have to go back to 1 John, to these well-known words of chapter 3, verses 14 and 19, where you find that emphasized there. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

And by this, he says, we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him. So walking in the truth, but walking in love is equally important to that.

And the two are always side by side, hand in hand. And this, of course, is no mere sentiment for John. This is no theory. This is not something that he holds as an opinion in his mind that has no practical consequences.

As he says there in chapter 3 of 1 John, the love that he's talking about there in verse 14, by this, we know we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

[15:29] And it goes on to say, if anyone has this world's good and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or in talk, but in deed, and in truth.

Because, you see, love is itself intensely practical. It's one thing to say to someone, I love you. How does that person know that unless there's something more than mere words?

It has to have practical activity. It has to have action. It has to have something that demonstrates that you're really serious about what you're saying when you say, I love somebody. Somebody that's dear to you in this world, when you say you love them, well, you show that love in some concrete, tangible way.

And it's the same in Christian love. As John is concerned, this is a distinguishing mark of Christians that they love one another and they love one another practically. They look out for each other. They help each other.

They support each other. They seek in every way to really follow the love that's been shown to them by God. Not from a distance, but coming right into their situation in the person of Jesus Christ.

[16:39] And that's where he here talks about love not just as a practical thing, but also, you see, walking according to his commandments. In verse 6, this is love.

And this is typical of John. He turns things round so wonderfully that you think you've grasped a point and maybe you have. Then he moves on to relate it to something else.

And he joins together these such important concepts as truth and love and obedience and so on.

And he builds them all together into a magnificent framework for the Christian life.

And here he is saying, this is love that we walk according to his commandments. In other words, you see love in terms of obedience as well as practical ministry to others.

this is love that we walk according to his commandments. And that should always be balanced in the Christian church.

[17:40] There should always be an important balance between truth and love. John Stott in his commentary on John says this, The Christian fellowship should be marked equally by love and truth.

And we are to avoid the dangerous tendency to extremism, pursuing either at the expense of the other. Our love grows soft if it is not strengthened by truth.

And our truth grows hard if it is not softened by love. We need to live according to scripture which commands us both to love each other in the truth and to hold the truth in love.

And I think Stott has really brought out that wonderful balance between truth and love in his comment there. That is how we always should hold truth and love in balance in our Christian lives. So here is walking in the truth and secondly walking in love. And then he draws all that together by, in terms of being watchful in verse 8 here where he says watch yourselves so that you may not lose what we have worked for but may win a full reward and so on.

[19:02] Now he is saying yes you know the truth of God you are walking in the truth of God you know love as something that has come from your relationship with God in Christ you need to love one another you are loving one another you want that to grow all of that is built into what he is saying but as well as that he is saying in truth and in love be watchful look after yourselves look after yourself and yourselves as a Christian fellowship because he says many deceivers have gone out into the world verse 7 those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh and he goes on to speak about that being the Antichrist and indeed he goes on to say such a one as the deceiver and the Antichrist who does not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh and he talks there about many deceivers have gone out into the world and again when you go back to 1 John chapter 2 and verses 18 to 19 that's what you find him saying children it is the last hour and as you have heard that Antichrist is coming so now many Antichrists have come therefore we know that it is the last hour and by the last hour he means we are in the section of history however long it takes between the ascension of Christ to glory and his return in judgment the last hour is that great span of history and it might be many many many generations might be hundreds thousands of years we don't know but it is the last hour in terms of where it slots into the scheme of God's

redemption and what he is telling us is that here is the fact of the matter there are many Antichrists have gone out into the world and if it was through in John's day it is certainly through in our day the many Antichrists that have come to deny the biblical doctrine of the incarnation especially the person of Christ being the son of God divine in his own person but having taken a real humanity to himself in being born of a human mother into this world and living the life described here in the Bible in the Gospels dying the death of the cross rising from the dead ascending to glory these are all built into what John is talking about not just one or other aspect of that but the whole package if you like of the person of Jesus the work of Jesus the completeness of Christ's work the sufficiency of Christ's work that nothing needs to be added to it nothing is to be taken from it it's there it's all together of God and he is saying there are many deceivers many Antichrists who deny some or other aspect of that truth and I need not tell you that that's very much the case in the present day as well but it's interesting that John actually says that they have gone out into the world and that again relates to what he says in the first epistle chapter 2 verses 18 to 19 as we've just read they went out from us in verse 19 but they were not of us in other words they began within the church and they began within the church of John's day and they proceeded out from that because the heresy that they developed was not acceptable to the likes of an apostle like John who valued the truth of God as he did and therefore they left and went somewhere else and the Bible always tells us that while it is important to be watchful against what comes from outside it is probably even more important to be watchful about what develops on the inside of the church remember that's what Paul actually said when he went to speak to the elders in Ephesus in Acts chapter 20 as he met with them for the last time and it's such a poignant passage full of emotion they knew that they weren't going to see him again he knew that they weren't going to see he wasn't going to see them either but this is what he said to them when he when he met them in verse 30 remember how he said there

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock that's the first thing he's saying they're going to come from outside they're going to come into your fellowship they're not going to spare you they're fierce wolves just like wolves naturally will not spare the sheep but then he turns it around and he says and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after him therefore be alert same thing as John remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears that was his business as a as an apostle to come to ground people in the truth and now here is John saying you watch yourselves look after yourselves as you're coming to this new stage as a congregation where you're anticipating a new ministry this does not lose its relevance it doesn't lose its relevance whoever it is that's in a pulpit wherever it is watch yourselves look after yourselves because the world is full of deceivers there are many out there that are seeking to make their way in and then lead you astray the bible is always setting before us our need for watchfulness so we need to be as he puts it here watchful in other words be on high alert because in verse 9 he says everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of

Christ does not have God whoever abides in the teaching has both the father and the son and what he's saying there basically is there are many people who have gone out from us they took up this heresy or this other aspect of the personal work of Christ that's really heretical they went out from us you need to watch yourselves against that he's saying because those who go on ahead as he puts it there and do not abide in the teaching of Christ whatever they may say of that being progress and you know that kind of idea you read about it you hear it progress in terms of new ideas about Jesus new ideas about what God is like or who God is new ideas about how important it is to bear other views in mind place them even alongside of the gospel as of equal validity new ideas that come

I'm saying new because they're not new essentially but they may be new to us in the emphasis that will say to you well actually you know the reformation just wasn't right in the way it went about things in its emphasis on justification by faith those sort of things you're very familiar with them I'm sure and they're very persuasive and they're put before us as if this was progress as if we who hold literally to the truth of the Bible are very backward are very much in a bygone age and we should really move up to the times well what is John saying well that's he's saying supposing you say of yourself that you're very progressive theologically and in terms of your Christian practice if you don't have God what's the point that's what he's saying whoever moves ahead whoever goes on and does not abide in the teaching of

[27 : 23] Christ does not have God that's the crucial issue do I have God do I have God in my life am I just following my own opinions am I following the opinions of others am I content to just go along with a stream of modernist teaching or am I going to abide in the teaching of Christ and for you and I today there's surely no question despite all the temptations that surround us to do otherwise we're going to walk in the truth aren't we we're going to walk in love aren't we we're going to watch ourselves and look after one another in truth and in love because that is God's way and as you yourselves reach this juncture I do pray that that will continue to be your emphasis as it is up to this moment and that you will know more of what it means to walk in the truth and to walk in love and to be watchful for Christ's sake for God's sake for the kingdom's sake in an age that is filled with alternatives you could say this is an insight into life in the first century church and it's life in a dangerous age for

Christians and it's equally so theologically at least for ourselves may God bless these thoughts let's pray Lord our God we thank you for your truth and we thank you for the way that you have set your truth in written form for us in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and we thank you especially that you have come to reveal yourself in Jesus Christ and that in him we find truth personified and set before us in the teaching of your word as we look into his face and find indeed that God's truth is shining upon us we pray your blessing for this congregation in these days to come we ask oh Lord that you would bless them as they anticipate a new chapter in the history of the congregation and in their own experience under a new ministry and we pray Lord that you would bless Ian and Connie as they come to settle in the congregation we pray that you would bless

Ian's ministry and we pray that it may prove to be greatly productive of much good and blessing and we commit all of this to you oh Lord and ask that you continue to enable us to watch and to care for each other during these times receive our thanks we pray now and pardon our sin for Jesus sake amen well we're going to conclude with another singing this time it's in psalm 119 in the sing psalms version and section 17 find it on page 165 psalm 119 verse 129 your statutes Lord are wonderful so I obey them from my heart your words as they unfold give light and truth to simple minds impart so on to the end of that section your statutes Lord are wonderful your statutes

Lord are wonderful so I obey them from my heart your words as they unfold in light and truth and truth to simple minds impart with open love I pant and yearn to know the laws that you provide show show me show me the mercy you extend to those who love and praise your name

I read my footsteps in your word heart let sin not hold me in its way from that oppression set me free that your commands I may obey obey upon your servant shine your face teach me the statutes you have made my righteousness you have made my righteousness of bitter tears because your love is not obeyed your love is not obeyed now we'll have the benediction now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore amen