

Walking in Truth and love

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 December 2024

Preacher: Peter Young

[0 : 00] This series is called Little Letters, and fun fact, 2 John is the second smallest or second shortest book in the whole Bible, by word count, that is.

And the shortest is 3 John, which we're going to do next week. So if you want to hear a sermon on the shortest book in the Bible, it should mean that the sermon should be shorter, shouldn't it?

We'll see. Let's pray. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we ask that as we turn our attention to your word, that you will speak to us, and as you speak, you will touch our hearts, and as our hearts are touched, our lives will be affected, and we might live for your glory.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. All you need is love, John Lennon wrote, and the Beatles sang it.

What a wonderful sentiment. All you need is love. If everyone loved everyone else, everything would be great, and all the problems would go away.

[1 : 29] All you need is love. But is that really true? Is love all you need? Is there more to it than that?

All you need is love? Maybe the gospel according to the Beatles and countless other songs and movies.

But is that what the Bible really teaches? And as we heard a few minutes ago, today's passage gives us a different perspective.

If John the Apostle had been writing in the place of John Lennon, the song might have been, you need love and truth, which isn't nearly as catchy, but it actually is closer to truth.

John's point in this whole letter is that love and truth go together. They're not two options in the menu of faith.

[2 : 35] But they're two essential parts of that faith. Both are needed. They're like, as we saw, two railway tracks on which our faith runs.

Now, our world is very confused about both of these terms, isn't it? For many people, truth is relative.

You find your own truth, we are told. Well, the Bible knows nothing of that. The truth, which this letter refers to, is the truth of Jesus Christ.

The Son of God becoming human, which we've just celebrated at Christmas. And that same Son of God become human, dying on the cross for us, to bring us back to God.

And we accept that bringing back to God gift that we are given by believing the truth, the truth of Jesus, and turning away from our rebellious ways and our sinful acts.

[4 : 03] Love is similarly misunderstood. It's not simply the warm feelings and thoughts that John Lennon wrote about.

But it's the self-giving act of the will that is exemplified and shown to us by the Lord Jesus in that same act on that same cross.

So this letter doesn't just tell us about the relative place of love and truth, but it also helps in our redefinition of it, reorienting our minds to it.

So let's get into the letter. First up, the writer introduces himself as the elder.

It's most probably, almost definitely the Apostle John writing in his very old age. And it's written to the elect lady, which was, some people say, a particular lady, but more likely it's a metaphor for referring to the church.

[5 : 22] And then her children then refers to members of that church. And these are people who John, the great apostle, loves in the truth, as he says.

And he says in verse 2 that he actually loves them because of the truth. He's talking about the truth of the gospel.

Isn't he? And all Christians everywhere have this same bond of love because of the truth we hold to. Previously, I worked for the international expression of the mission agency Pioneers.

And in that role, I got to meet Christian people from all over the world. And as I did so, the reality of this truth that we have a bond because of our faith came home to me.

Wherever I went in the world, I had instant connection with other believers. My brothers and sisters who had and still have a love for me because of our shared faith in the Lord Jesus.

[6 : 48] It didn't matter that neither of us had a word in each other's language. But because of the truth that we both held on to, we had a love for one another.

What an incredible thing. What an amazing thing. That we are joined to people all over the world who we don't even know, who we don't even understand.

Amazing. Ancient letters followed the format, as you probably know, starting with the person from whom the letter is.

And in this case, it was the elder, as we have seen. And then the recipients are identified.

And we see that in verses 1 and 2. Before going on to a greeting and then the rest of the letter.

That's just the normal pattern of things. And so the greeting here is really a statement of the gospel.

[8 : 01] Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ. Which is with us in truth and love.

Again, we have this two-railed faith. God's grace and mercy result in peace with him. And this is seen in our lives as we have love and adhere to the truth.

Now, scripture often uses the image of life as being like a walk.

And we saw that in Psalm 1, which we had read to us earlier. And it's seen throughout the scriptures. Even as far back as Genesis.

We have faith as being like a walk. And John uses that image here in these verses.

[9 : 08] Verses 4 to 6 talk about this. In verse 4, he talks about walking in the truth. Again, in verse 6, he refers to walking in love.

You see a pattern developing here. A repetition of these two themes over and over again. The other day at the cricket, which I'm sure you're all fascinated with.

There was a coin toss. The captain flipped the coin in the air. And the visiting captain called heads or tails.

And that decided who did what first in the game. Now, if you looked at that coin lying on the MCG grass and were asked to describe it.

That's not the actual coin, by the way. You might conclude that coins are round metal discs with the head of the sovereign embossed on them.

[10 : 23] That's all you see. But of course, we all know that coins have another side, which looks different. They have a design which we call tails.

It's the same coin, but we see different things when we look at different sides of it. And we would have a very deficient understanding of coins and numismatics, as it's called, if we thought that it was all about heads and not tails as well.

Or vice versa. And we can make that same mistake as Christian people in matters of faith. We can look at it as all being about believing the right things.

And neglect everything else. Or we can see that it's all about loving people. And being kind and leading the right life.

And say, well, you can believe what you like as long as you're living properly. And we put labels on one another. We stand for the true doctrine.

[11 : 49] The others are a bunch of touchy-feely liberals. Or we are being truly loving Christians, unlike those cold and lifeless legalists over there.

Well, both are needed. Love and truth. Life and doctrine.

And verses 4 to 6 of our reading bring those two together. John, in effect, flips the coin for us so we can see both sides.

In verse 4, John speaks of the great joy he experiences to hear that some of the church are walking in truth.

Now, it may mean that only some of them are walking in the truth and others are not. Or it may mean that John only knows some of them.

[12 : 53] And those people who he knows are walking in the truth. It doesn't really matter. In either case, he was delighted that some of them, at least, were holding on to truth.

As they had been commanded. In John 13, 35, Jesus had given a new command, hadn't he? Do you remember John 13, 34 and 35? Has anybody memorized that? I don't see all of your hands. Maybe you're shy. I'll read it for you so you'd answer it. A new command I give you. Love one another. As I, that is Jesus, have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. Jesus gave this command as a new commandment.

[14:03] But by the time John writes, of course, it's not a new command anymore. In fact, it's a command they have had ever since the start of Christianity.

Ever since they first believed, they've known this command. And John wants to emphasize that it's the one that they are to observe.

They are to love one another. Just as he commended their obedience of the command to walk in truth, now he reminds them of the command to love one another.

But practically, loving one another, what does that really involve? Well, first of all, it means we have to know one another. We have to make an effort to get to know one another.

Beyond just a nodding acquaintance on a Sunday. It means being involved in each other's lives. It means putting the needs and the good of our brothers and sisters above our own.

[15:19] Actively looking for ways to serve one another. In 2025, who are you going to pray?

Pray that you will do that for. Get to know them better. Look for their needs and what will serve them.

And put it in the practice. I challenge you to think of at least one person, if not a handful, of people that you will actively seek to love better from our congregation.

And love to God is shown not only by knowing truth, but by obeying it, including that commandment to love one another.

And that's what John calls walking in love. So do you see what he's done? In verse, he's gone from one side of the coin to the other.

[16:42] From walking in truth to walking in love. And both involve obedience to God.

They're not opposites. They are both part of walking as Christian people. Walking in obedience. Now, as with most New Testament letters, this letter isn't written as a theoretical exercise, but in response to a particular problem that had come up.

An issue which John states in verse 7. I say this, that is all that he has said so far, 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. There were false teachers getting around. The truth is being challenged.

[17:57] And it seems that these particular deceivers, as John calls them, were in some way teaching that Jesus wasn't really a human being.

And John doesn't hold back. They're not just called deceivers, but they're actually called the antichrist, the opposite of Christ, the opposers of Christ.

They're opposed to Christ and therefore opposed to God himself. Now, we don't have this exact teaching as much these days.

But we do have lots who deny the identity of Christ in some way. Usually, we hear it, them denying the actual divinity of Christ, that Jesus wasn't really fully God.

Or they teach some different way of how we can have salvation in him. And John gives two commands of what we are to do in light of this.

[19:22] Verse 8 tells us and gives us the first of these commands for the false teachers. Watch out. Watch out.

Watch out.

Watch out.

Follow us. Follow us. so it is with those who run ahead of Christ. Walking with God is a relational image.

If we move past Jesus, leave the elementary things about Jesus and stuff behind, let's go on to the deeper things of Christian life, all of the special bits and bobs that we can find.

[21:33] If we do that, we in effect abandon Jesus and are in real danger of getting lost. But notice what it is that keeps us in step with Jesus.

It's stated twice there in verse 9. Continuing in the teaching of Christ, whoever continues in the teaching, we stay in step, walking with God through the teaching of Christ, which is, of course, found in God's Word.

And whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. The way that we can watch out and make sure that we don't run ahead is to keep soaking ourselves in God's Word. Develop daily habits of getting input from the Bible, whether that means using a reading guide or notes or listening to a recording of the Scriptures or going through a book chapter by chapter, reading it with somebody else.

There are many different and practical ways that we can do that, but let's develop it into habits so that it's our normal thing that we do.

[23 : 23] Let's keep coming to a church where we hear God's Word preached. Take opportunities like the summer Bible studies, which we heard in the announcements.

Join and participate in a Bible study group. This year, let's make, develop these kind of habits of input of God's Word and let's speak God's Word to one another.

It takes intentionality, doesn't it? You can't watch out by accident or incidentally or as you're doing other things.

Well, if the first imperative is to watch out, the second is not to give false teachers support or a platform.

And this instruction may seem a little bit harsh and unloving. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them.

[24 : 48] Oh, that's a bit not nice. At the time when John was writing, there were itinerant preachers who went from place to place preaching and teaching God's Word.

And we'll read more about them when we look at 3 John next week. But for now, we have to realize that to welcome them, to put them up, give them accommodation, give them a place where they could hold their meetings, was not just giving hospitality, but it was actually endorsing them and their message.

And for genuine preachers of God's Word, that wasn't a problem. In fact, it's quite commendable.

But John is saying that when you recognize people as deceivers, don't support them.

Don't give them any endorsement. In today's world, we might say, don't like them on social media.

Don't pay money to hear their message. Don't buy their books. Don't share their posts. Don't give them opportunity in our churches.

[26 : 22] And that might seem unloving. But haven't we just said that we are to love one another? But we are to remember that truth, love goes together with truth.

The truth of the gospel are to go together with the love that comes from the gospel. Love, but love in truth.

And some of these modern-day deceivers may even dress their false teaching up in language of being more loving and tolerant.

But truth isn't judged by what feels right. It's judged by what God teaches in His Word. Andrew Reid, who was the pastor here for a number of years, used to ask us as His congregations to routinely and habitually evaluate what He said from the pulpit by the Word of God.

Test it. He would ask us to do that. Keep Him accountable to the truth. It's not truth just because I or any one of the other pastors says so, although we all work hard to ensure that we are true to God's Word.

[27 : 54] It's truth only because it is God's Word. We are all to watch out. in verse 4 of John, 2 John, John wrote that it gave him great joy to find that some of your children are walking in the truth.

In verse 12 and 13, he says he wants to come to them and that his joy would be complete, that same joy that he felt when he knew they were walking in the truth would be complete when he saw them face to face.

The lived out faith of true believers is a great source of encouragement and joy. If you are faithful in your, if you are a true believer walking in truth and love, you are a great encouragement to other people.

We are to take encouragement from the Christian life of those around us. So what of applications? First of all, we need both good doctrine and true love for God. We need true love for other people, for other believers.

[29 : 36] The balance of these two, truth and love, are important. If you feed the truth, you will grow in love.

If you love truly, if you love God truly and others, you will want to spread God's truth to those who have never heard it as well as to those who love him.

Be lovers of the truth and be truly loving. Walk in truth and walk in love. And watch out for those who run ahead.

don't join them, but stay close to Jesus. Don't give space in your life to teachers of what is less than or even more than the truth.

Don't pass such teaching on to others. may God give us hearts that love and obey him, that love his people and all people.

[30 : 51] And may our hearts be so soaked in the truth that our way of life is a walk of truth and love.

Let's pray. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we do ask that you will build into our lives love and truth, that we might truly love you and love your truth, and that in all things we might glorify your name. We pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.