

Walking in Truth and Love

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[0 : 00] Well, I have a special surprise for you.

The outline in your handouts is not the right outline. Well, the good thing is that you get the outline of a totally different sermon for free.

This series that we are starting today is entitled Little Letters.

It's some of the small books of the Bible. We're going to be doing a couple from the New Testament and a couple from the Old Testament.

And that will take us up to the end of January. So we're starting today with 2 John and a little bit of trivia for you. 2 John is the second shortest book by word count in the entire Bible.

[1 : 12] And the actual winner of that category, the shortest book in the entire Bible, is 3 John, which we're going to be looking at next week.

So you should expect nice, concise sermons. In theory. In theory. Let's pray.

Lord God, as we have had your word read to us, and as we turn to think about your word now, we ask that you would guide our thoughts and my words, so that we may be guided into all truth and that receiving the truth, we may be doers of it.

To the honour of your name. Amen. All you need is love. Love. Or so John Lennon wrote and the Beatles sang.

What a wonderful sentiment. If everyone loved everyone else, everything would be great. And all the problems would go away.

[2 : 38] But is that really true? Is love all you need? Is there more to it than that?

That may be the gospel according to the Beatles. And countless other movies and songs. But is that what the Bible teaches?

Well, 2 John gives a slightly different perspective. If John the Apostle had written the song in place of John Lennon, it might be something like, you need truth and love.

Not quite as catchy as all you need is love. But he's not writing a song. He's writing God's word to us. And John's point in this letter is that truth and love go together.

They're not two options on the menu of faith, but two essential parts of our faith. Both are needed. They're like two railway tracks that our faith runs on.

[3 : 55] And those two terms, truth and love, are very confusing in our world.

We struggle to define them. For many people, truth is relative. You need to find your own truth, we are told.

But the Bible knows nothing of that kind of truth. The truth, which John writes about, here in this second letter of John, is the truth of the gospel.

It's the truth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, becoming a human being, which we celebrated just a few days ago.

It's the truth of that God become human, going to the cross and dying on the cross for us in order to bring us back to God.

[5 : 07] It's the truth that we need to accept that by believing and by turning away from our sin, that which our rebelliousness against God.

That is what John means by the truth. And love, likewise, is not simply warm feelings and thoughts like what John Lennon wrote about.

But it's self-giving. It's an act of the will whereby we move towards other people in selflessness.

And it's exemplified and illustrated and shown for us by that same act of Jesus' death on the cross. So, this letter doesn't tell us about relative truth or theoretical love.

It's talking about truth that leads to action and love that leads to action. Well, let's look at the letter itself.

[6 : 33] The letter is from the elder. We have every reason to believe that this is John the Apostle who wrote John's Gospel, who wrote Revelation, who wrote the other letters of John.

And again, he's probably a very old man at this time. The elder is probably a very apt title for him. And it's written to the elect lady, which was a figurative way of talking about a church.

It's not, probably not talking about an actual woman. It's talking about the lady, the church as a lady, a chosen lady.

And her children then refers to the individual members of that church. And these are people who John, the writer of this letter, loves in the truth, as he says.

And it, indeed, it goes on to tell us in verse 2 that it is because of the truth that he loves them. Because of the gospel.

[7 : 57] And all Christians, everywhere, have that same bond of love. In my previous job, I worked with the international expression of a mission agency, Pioneers, and I got to meet Christian people from all over the world.

And as I did so, the reality of the love that Christians have came home to me. Wherever I went in the world, I had an 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.

It didn't matter that neither of us had a word of each other's language, but because there was that truth, that shared truth, that we both held to, there was a love for one another.

What an amazing thing. You have brothers and sisters, if you are a follower of Jesus, you have brothers and sisters all over the world who love you and who, when you come across them, you have an instant bond with them.

[9 : 21] Well, ancient letters followed a format, as you probably know. first of all, the writer would write who the letter was from, which is what we had in verse 1.

The elder, John. And then the writer would put down who it was to, and in this case it was this church who he identifies as the elect lady.

After that came a greeting of some sort. And this is, in verse 3, we see this greeting. And the greeting here is a statement of the gospel in effect.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, the Father, and Jesus with us in truth and love. Again, we see this two-railed faith.

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

[10 : 39] So, greetings over. We now move into the body of the letter. And John uses an image that's found throughout scripture of our lives being like a walk.

And we saw that in Psalm 1. We see it all the way back, even, the image is even used at the very start in the garden where God and human beings walked together in the garden in that perfect state before we started to sin.

And John talks about in verse 4 and verse 6 about walking in truth, walking in the truth and walking in love, as you can see highlighted there in verses 4 and 6.

And there's also a reference in verse 6 about walking in obedience, which we'll come to in a minute. So we have these two themes that John seems to be hammering into us, truth and love.

The other day at the cricket, because everybody loves cricket, right, there was a coin toss. The captain of the home team, Pat Cummings, flipped a coin in the air.

[12 : 18] And the visiting captain, the Indian captain, called either heads or tails, and when the coin landed, the winner of that toss got to decide who batted and who bowled first.

first. Now, if you looked at that coin lying on the grass in the MCG and you didn't know anything about coins, and if you were asked to describe it, you might conclude that coins are round metal disks with the head of a sovereign on them, because that's all you see.

but of course, we know that coins have another side that looks different. It has a design that we call tails.

It's the same coin, but we see different things when we turn them over. and we would have a very deficient understanding of coins if we thought it was all about heads or all about tails.

If you were to describe a coin, you have to describe both sides, because they're different, but they're the same coin. And we can make the same kind of mistake as Christian people in matters of faith.

[13:53] We can look at it as being all about believing the right things and neglect to recognise the other side of the coin, which is living in love.

Or we can do the other mistake and say it's all about living in love. It doesn't matter what you believe.

No, both are needed. And we easily put labels on one another according to where our emphasis is. We stand for the true doctrine. The others are a bunch of touchy-feely liberals. Or we're the true loving Christians, unlike those cold, lifeless legalists over there.

And in John, 2 John, verses 4 to 6, John brings these two together.

[15:03] He shows us, he flips the coin for us. He shows us how the coin looks on the other side and that it is all one coin, as it were.

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

Now, when he says some of them, that might mean one of two things. It might mean that only some of them are walking in truth and the others aren't.

Or it might mean that John only knows some of them and the ones he knows are walking in truth. In any case, he is delighted that they are holding on to truth and doing what they have been commanded.

commanded. Now, as he moves on to verse 5, he talks about another sort of command.

[16:24] You may have memorized at one stage or another John chapter 13, verses 34 and 35. How many have memorized that?

I won't embarrass you by getting you to quote it. I will read it to you. John chapter 13, verse 34.

A new command I give you.

Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.

love one another. So, Jesus had given this command as a new command, not that loving was a new command, but loving as Jesus had loved was the new command.

[17:40] Now, by the time that John writes his letter, which we call to John, it's of course not a new command anymore.

It had been around since the start of Christianity. This, Jesus had said it and set it as a new command just before he went to the cross.

it's a command that they've had since they first believed and John wants to emphasize that they are to observe that command, to do what God, what Jesus has commanded them, love one another.

They are to obey this command just as they obeyed the command of walking in truth, which he mentioned in verse four.

Now, what does this practically mean? What does it mean to follow the command of loving one another? Because we can't conjure up feelings for one another.

[19:00] Very easily. I can't. Loving like Jesus loved doesn't mean just having gushy feelings about one another.

It means, first of all, making efforts to know one another, spending time with one another. But it means putting the needs and good of our brothers and sisters before ourselves, above our own needs and the good for ourselves.

It's actively looking for ways to serve one another. It's actively looking to do good and to bless another person.

God listen. It's a decision. It's not something you have to feel first. And I want to challenge you.

As we start 2025, I want you to pray for someone, someone who is a believer, that God would show you ways to practically love that person, to do things that would be for their good, to find a way to serve them without looking for anything back from them.

[20:40] would you do that? At least one person. You can pick a handful if you like, but at least one. And love for God is shown by not only knowing the truth, but obeying it, keeping the commands, including the command to love.

Do you see what John is doing? Because this is what John calls walking in love. He has moved from walking in truth in verse 4, which is obeying the commands of God.

Obeying the commands of God is also walking in love. He's flipped the coin. Truth and love exist on the same coin.

They're not opposites. They're part of what it means to be a Christian person, walking in obedience. God is not to God is to God is to God is God is God is to John.

John isn't just written as a theoretical exercise, but it's in response to a particular issue that had come up. And John states that reason in verse 7.

[22 : 21] I say this, that is everything he has said, I say this because many deceivers who do not acknowledge that 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.

And it seems that these particular deceivers, as John calls them, were in some way teaching that Jesus wasn't really fully human.

And John doesn't hold back. They're not just called deceivers, they're called the antichrist, the opposite of Christ, the very, those who oppose Christ, and hence oppose God.

Now, we don't have this teaching around so much these days, but we do have lots of people who deny the identity of Christ in some way.

[23 : 35] Usually, they deny that Jesus was truly God. God. Or, they teach something different about how we have salvation in him.

And so, John gives two commands about these sorts of people. In verse 8, we have the first of those two commands.

Watch out. be aware, because what is at stake here is your faith and actually the church itself. What we have worked for, what John and his fellow apostles have worked for. Rather than walking in truth, obedience, and love, these people are depicted as running ahead.

Now, I enjoy bushwalking, and I particularly enjoy walking in good company. But if the person I'm walking with decides to run ahead of me, to finish the walk first, or because they don't like my company or my pace or whatever it is, I may as well be walking alone, mightn't I?

[25 : 02] they aren't really with me at all. And what's more, if they don't know the walk we're on, they don't know the route of the walk, they may end up getting lost, or at least ending up at a different destination to the one I'm going to.

And so it is with those who run ahead of Christ. Walking with God is a relational image, walking alongside him, being with him.

And if we move past Jesus, we go on to something better. Oh yes, that faith in Jesus thing, that's the start, but actually to be a real Christian, to be a super Christian, to get the true spirituality, you need to do this, you need to be experienced this way, you need to have this particular thing.

And if we do that, we in effect abandon Jesus, and we're in danger of getting lost. But notice what it is that keeps us in step with Jesus.

It's stated twice here in verse 9, continue in the teaching of Christ. Continue in the teaching.

[26 : 35] We stay in step, walking with God through the teaching of Christ, which is found in God's word. Whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

God's love. The way that we can watch 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 by using one of the program reading notes or guides or listening to it, or by going through a book or chapter, or studying it with someone else, etc.

There's lots of practical ways that we can develop habits of making sure that we get input from God's word every day. Keep coming to a church where you'll hear God's word preached.

Take opportunities like Engage Conference, like Summer Under the Sun, like the Bible study series on Wednesday night.

Join and participate in a Bible study group this year. Speak God's word to one another. Keep God's word before you.

[28 : 07] Soak it in. Take every opportunity. opportunity. But you see, this takes intentionality.

You don't watch out by accident, do you? You can't. You have to actively do it. And so it is with watching out for false teaching.

We have to actively seek out God's word, soak ourselves in it. well, if the first imperative is to watch out, the second is not to give false teachers support or a platform.

And it may sound 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.

Oh, is that right? at the time that John was writing this, there were itinerant preachers who went around the place from village to village preaching and teaching God's word.

[29 : 26] And we'll read more about them next week when we look at 3 John. But what we have to realise for now is that when they came to a village, taking them in, showing them hospitality, giving them space to hold their meetings, etc., was in effect endorsing their message.

For genuine preachers of God's word, that wasn't a problem, and in fact, it's commendable to endorse their message.

But John's saying, when there are people that you recognise as deceivers, when they come, don't support them, don't give them any endorsement, don't give them a platform for their teaching. 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, you don't have to pass it on, you don't have to have that.

As a part of your thing. And that might seem a little bit unloving. Haven't we just said that to love one another? But remember that truth and love go together.

[31 : 05] The truth of the gospel and love go together. Love, but love in the truth. truth. Now some modern day deceivers might even dress up their false teaching in language of being more loving and more tolerant.

But truth is not judged by what feels right, but by what God teaches in his word. Andrew Reid, who was the pastor at Holy Trinity, when he was pastor there, often challenged us and asked us to evaluate what he was preaching by the standard of God's word.

That is, hold him accountable for what he said. Make sure that what was being said actually came from God's word. It's a good principle.

It's not just truth because I or one of the other pastors says it. Although we do work hard to ensure that we are true to God's word.

But it is only truth because it is God's word. In verse 4, John wrote that hearing of the faith of some of the church members gave him great joy.

[32 : 33] And here in verse 12, he says that his joy would be complete when he saw them face to face. The lived out faith of true believers is a source of real encouragement and joy.

And we can take great joy in the faith of other people. We should be looking for each other's faith, evidences of others' faith, and take joy in it.

Rejoice. Praise God for it. Well, finally, two applications. First of all, we need both good doctrine and true love for God, true love for other believers and all people.

people. The balance of those is important. If you feed the truth, you will grow in love. If you truly love God and others, you'll want to spread God's truth to those who've never heard as well as to those who do love him.

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

[33 : 58] Don't join them, but stay close to Jesus. And don't give space in your life to teachers of what is less than or what is more than the truth.

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

And may those hearts be so soaked in truth that our way of life is a walk of truth and love.

Let's pray. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we pray that you will give us hearts that seek to obey you and to love your truth and to love you and each other in the spirit of your Son, Jesus.

We pray this to his glory. Amen.