

# Faithful in Truth and Love

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn together to 2 John this evening and we'll look at this whole letter of John, the second letter. 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.

And it finishes, the children of your elect sister greet you. Now I understand that Christians in different parts of the world today need at times to use coded messages in order to get what they want to say to their fellow Christians through safely to them.

And you can understand that because if they were found out to be Christians or meeting together as Christians in places where Christianity is banned, where there are severe punishments for gathering together to worship, then obviously that would spell trouble for that fellowship.

And it's very likely the case that this description at the beginning of the letter and the end of this letter of John is a kind of code for God's people or God's church.

It could be an individual woman that he's writing to. He calls himself the elder, the person with pastoral responsibilities for those that he's writing to or the person he's writing to.

[ 1 : 32 ] But there are things throughout the letter that make it more likely that he's talking about a group of Christians or a congregation or church, somewhere where there are dangers to them as Christians, where they would rather not have everything that they're saying and doing detected by the authorities.

We know, for example, as John lived, as the last of the apostles towards the very end of the apostolic age, that by that time severe persecutions had broken out against Christians in different parts of the Roman Empire.

And the dangers were obvious because Christians in those days sometimes would have to try and find a place to stop for the night or to live on the way towards wherever they were going.

And obviously anything they were carrying would then be subject sometimes to searches or could be actually discovered if they were carrying any Christian messages with them.

And there were many false apostles around as well that didn't have much time for people like John and those who supported him and prayed for him and kept to the truth of God.

[ 2 : 48 ] They were dangerous days. And we're told that in those days if you stopped at an inn, for example, there are records from those times kept by the Romans themselves.

And inns were very dangerous places. Places where you could be captured, where you could be killed, where you could be mugged. And where especially if you were a Christian, you would have your life placed in danger.

So that's the kind of background we have in these circumstances that John lived in and those he was writing to here, which is why many scholars believe that this is a coded message for a church, the elder, to the elect lady and her children.

The congregation, this lady and the children being the members of that congregation. And he's writing this to them and finishing by saying, the children of your elect sister greet you.

The group that he belonged to, wherever he was, were sending greetings to them. So it wouldn't really appear if anyone caught the carrier of this message, this letter, if anyone caught them and examined it, it wouldn't appear, at least without a lot of insight, that this was anything to do with the church, but it was simply, it looked like a private letter to an individual.

[ 4 : 09 ] Be that as it may, it is John who's writing it as a tremendous encouragement and support to those that he's writing to.

We're taking it that it was to a Christian group. And John was such a wonderful teacher, a wonderful example, a wonderful encourager, a wonderful theologian, a person who was so close to God and who knew Christ so well and passed on the things of Christ so beautifully in his gospel and in his

letters.

And he focuses in this letter and did parts of the first letter of John on the truth of God. It's such an important element to John in his writings.

And it should be and surely is for ourselves as well. And the three things we want to pick out this evening in relation to that are what he calls here walking in the truth, where he speaks there about the children or some of the children of the select lady.

I rejoiced greatly, verse 4, to find some of your children walking in the truth. And then he speaks about walking in love.

[ 5 : 21 ] This is love that we walk according to his commandments. I'm not writing a new commandment, but the one we've had from the beginning that we love one another. So walking in the truth always goes hand in hand with walking in love.

And thirdly, you have an emphasis on walking faithfully. He talks there about many deceivers that have gone out into the world, those who do not confess Christ as having come in the flesh.

So they are being given this admonition or this warning. Watch yourselves. Be careful how you go about things.

Be careful with what you believe. Be careful what you're actually taking in and how you're living accordingly. Because these deceivers can easily lead them astray.

So walking faithfully is an emphasis in relation to the truth and love. So that we can call the study this evening something like faithful in truth and love.

[ 6 : 29 ] Let's look at the three things. Walking in the truth. Now, of course, walking means following a path. It's just a simple way, a description all the way through the Bible that speaks about our life as believers being a walk.

Following a certain path that God has set out for us. And that path is the path of his truth, by and large. Because what he talks about here is how foundational the truth is.

The truth is something in which Christians are actually grounded and rooted. That's how the letter begins. The elder to these, this lady whom I love in truth.

Not only I, but all those who know the truth. Because of the truth that abides with us and will be with us forever. And then he speaks in verse 4 as those of our children who he found walking in the truth.

And he was delighting, rejoicing in the fact that it had been told him that this group of Christians were walking in the truth.

[ 7 : 34 ] Now, from all of that, we can see how foundational truth is to ourselves. But then you have to ask the question, what is the truth?

Where do you find the truth? How do you define truth? Is it more than just what is true? How have we come about to know what the truth is and where it's found?

How do you know when you've gone beyond the truth? All of that, of course, brings us back to God himself. Because in verse 3 there, grace, mercy and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus the Father's Son in truth and love.

And it's really bringing us back to the fact that ultimately truth is God himself. Ultimate truth. God is ultimate truth. Every other truth, if you call it truth, whatever you call truth, is it's really truth.

It's derived from God who is himself truth. Everything that he defines as truth is derived from, it comes from, it flows from the fact that truth is ultimately and firstly and primarily a characteristic of God himself.

[ 8 : 58 ] He is always the truth. He is always true because he's always the truth. And that means for us too that that truth that is God has been revealed to us.

Now that brings you to think about God revealing himself to us, particularly in Jesus Christ, his Son. And it is John especially who's concerned to tell us that what has happened in the coming of the Son of God in our nature, taking our nature, becoming human, is nothing less than the truth being revealed to us.

In the first chapter of John, we've mentioned this passage so many times, and yet it's so foundational that we need to come back to it again and again. What he says is that no one has actually seen God at any time, but the only begotten Son who's in the bosom, in the heart of the Father, he has shown him forth.

And then he goes on to say that truth came. The law was given through Moses. But grace and truth came in Jesus Christ.

God was opening his heart to us. He was opening his own nature to us, if we can put it that way, so that we could understand what truth is, where truth is found, what is true and what isn't.

[10:27] And what John is saying is, you begin with God, and then you move to the revelation that God has given us of himself, where the truth that is in him, and that marks everything about him, and what he has done and what he's still doing, it's been revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

And of course you remember too that Jesus himself said that he was in fact himself the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except by me. And that all fits in with what you have here with regard to these deceivers, as we'll see later, that have gone out into the world, that have gone out with other than the truth.

And John is reminding those he's writing to here, you have to stay with God. You have to stay with God's revelation of himself. You have to confine yourself to what God has said is true, or isn't true. Otherwise you're going to be led into ways that are false, and ways that will bring great harm to you. And of course it also means that the revelation of God's truth, the truth in himself, the truth through Jesus and Jesus, but we have the advantage as well that this is now set out for us in the writings of Scripture.

[11:58] And we can rightly call the Bible God's truth. Nothing in the Bible is out of accord with the truth as it is in God.

The truth as it has been revealed in Jesus. Because this is a divinely inspired word. That's why it's so critical that we counter the ideas that are so current in our day, not that they're new, but they're very much still alive, and indeed maybe multiplying in our day, the views that project to us because the Bible is really in need of review.

It's in need of alteration. It's in need of adjustment. You can't really believe every term that Paul, for example, used in his day when things were currently understood in a certain way, whether it's about marriage, or about relationship with God, or whatever else in terms of human behavior or human need.

People will tell us, theologians will tell us, that these things are no longer to be believed as Paul believed them. But then you see, you then have to ask, well, what is the truth?

How do you know what truth is? Is it adjustable? Is it something that you can manipulate? Is it something that you can change as time goes on?

[13:31] Is it something that you can actually change the very shape of, or the terms of, as things are found out through science or whatever about the world in which we live?

What John is saying, you can't do that. Truth is truth, and remains truth. And the way in which God has revealed the truth to us is something that means the Bible, his word, the written scriptures, are in fact the revelation of God to us, and therefore they are themselves the truth, the truth of God revealed.

In Colossians chapter 1, verses 5 and 6, you have something similar there to what John is saying here in the writings of Paul. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you as indeed in the whole world and is bearing fruit and growing.

To Paul, to John, the gospel is the truth of God, the truth of God is equivalent to the gospel. It doesn't mean God has revealed everything about himself to us.

[15:00] It doesn't mean everything he has revealed is absolutely clear to us and easily understood. But it does mean everything he has revealed to us is truth, stemming from the truth that he himself is, that is in himself.

And then he speaks about walking in the truth. The truth as it is in God, we're grounded in the truth, as the truth is in God, and as he's revealed that to us. And then he speaks here about walking in the truth.

In other words, he's talking really about living in conformity to the truth of God and taking the truth of God for what it is and applying it to our lives as our standard, as our standard of life, as our standard of behavior, as our standard in relationships with one another, as he's going on to speak about loving one another.

So it means all our relationships have to be carried out and fulfilled as far as we can possibly do in the truth and in accordance with the truth of God.

You see, when you follow Christ, it means to walk in the truth as the truth is in him. There is no wiggle room. There's no place for maneuvering just to get our own idea of what will be best in the circumstances, of what will be best in terms of the understanding of our day.

[16:30] If we're following Christ, we're following his truth and the truth that is in him. I don't have a choice as to what I believe if I believe God's truth if I'm a follower of Christ.

I don't have a choice as to whether or not I believe what he says about myself, about the world in which I live, about how my relationship should be conducted, about what marriage is, about what all of these things are that he defines for me in this word.

These are the terms of God's truth. We're not at liberty to change the terms of the truth despite what some people will say.

So to follow him means to accept what he has given me, to believe what he has stated for me, to rejoice in the truth as defined by God because I know that it's not going to change.

I know that I don't have to ask a question tomorrow, where am I going to find the truth? How do I know what the truth is? What truth am I going to apply to my life? Because it's already here.

[17:38] And that's not going to change because it is the truth of God. And tonight, for you and for me, what a huge privilege and benefit it is that we have been taught what is truth, where you find the truth, why the truth is important, why it's not adjustable, and how it's defined as the truth of God in Christ set out for us in the scriptures.

And walking in the truth, secondly, he speaks about walking in love. He says here, Now I ask you, dear lady, not as though I were writing a new commandment, but the one we've 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.

Now for John, Christian love for each other is a distinguishing mark of being a Christian. And he doesn't hesitate in the first letter to actually put it in that way in these terms in chapter 3, verses 14, and also in verse 19, you find it there where he speaks about we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

Whoever does not love abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. Then verse 19, by this we know, we shall know that we are of the truth and we assure our heart before him.

[19:32] Now go back and just remember the kind of days that John was living in. The danger to those who were confessedly Christians. The difficulties of living in that sort of world for Christ faithfully, of holding to the truth of God, especially when a command would go out from the emperor that you were to worship him, that Christians were to regard him as a God, as equivalent to their Jesus or even above their Jesus.

love. And the distinguishing mark of Christians was that they loved one another. And of course, John is telling us in his first epistle there that this love is not simply a sentiment.

It's not a mere sentiment. It's something that has to be seen in its activities. Back in chapter 3, again, that same context where he defines love in terms of Christ laying down his life for us, so we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

But if anyone has the words goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

In other words, John is saying, yes, love is something that involves attitude. it involves your mind and the way you think about other people.

[21:01] It involves that as you think of other Christians, who they are and what belongs to them as it belongs to you in Christ. But then you see, he says, it's not really love if it's confined to that.

It has to show itself practically in its activities, in the way that you do things, in love for your fellow Christians, in the way that you are active in their support, whether it is practical, physical, or otherwise.

So, when he says here that he's writing to remind this elect lady of the commandment that Christ had given that we love one another, it is a distinguishing mark because it was so difficult at times such as these to openly be seen to love those who said they were Christians and thereby you're

putting yourself in the sight of authorities who were looking out for these kind of people. It's still like that in parts of the world today. When you go to North Korea, places where Islam is rampant militant, very, very difficult to show love practically as the Bible requires, as Jesus requires, because you're then going to be noticed.

You're then more likely to be taken account of by the authorities and you're likely to be marked as somebody that's a target for the next imprisonment or the next assassination or the next attempt to bring Christians away from their profession by taking one of them and just acting cruelly towards them until their fellow Christians recant.

[ 23 : 01 ] It's not new. It's been in most generations where Christians have been persecuted. But this is what John is saying. That's why it's such an important thing for him that love is a mark of a Christian, a distinguishing mark, a mark that helps to set them apart and show them for what they are.

And he's reminding them here of that. But you do notice he's saying this is love that we walk according to his commandments. It's always interesting the way John turns things round just in the space of half a sentence.

What he's saying first of all here this is love this is commandment that we love one another. Then he turns it round and says this is love that we walk according to his commandments.

In other words you can never actually separate at all walking in the truth from walking in love.

Because when you're walking in love you're walking according to his commandments.

You're showing love to him first of all because you want to keep his word. You want to be true to him. And you have that defined for you in his word in his command.

[ 24 : 16 ] And therefore that's where your love begins with him and it spreads to your love for one another. It's a commanded walk walking in his commands.

Thirdly there's walking faithfully. Because he says many deceivers have gone out into the world. those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.

They have gone out into the world he says. And again if you flick back over to the first letter and you find there in 1st John you find that they are described as those who have gone out from us.

they did not stay with us they went out from us. Many antichrists there in the second chapter at verse 18. Children it is the last hour and as you've heard that antichrist is coming so now many antichrists have come.

Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us but they were not of us. For if they had been of us they would have continued with us but they went out that it might become plain that they are all they all are not of us.

[ 25 : 42 ] And that's interesting because what it brings out for us is the fact that these deceivers actually began in the church. They began within the fellowship of believers to show the variation in what they believed and the way they behaved.

Because in 1 John it's not just simply a matter of how they believed, what they believed. John is also saying that he was very much against the way they were living.

They were living in a very loose lifestyle and weren't at all keeping to the truth of God or the commands of God. Well he's saying they went out from us.

Now it's much more difficult and you need to be much more wary of deceivers. when they are within the church. When they're speaking in the name of God.

When they're passing themselves off as believers. When they're saying they're going out with the gospel. When they have certain things that are of the truth but are combined with things that are not or are contrary to the truth.

[ 26 : 52 ] They are deceivers. And John is quite adamant about it and John is in fact quite insistent on the fact that he uses the strongest terms to describe them.

They went out. They are many deceivers. They are in fact as he said in the first letter they are antichrists. They are opposed and contrary to the gospel.

That's so important in our own day as well. And here in 2 John he defines them as those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.

That seems to be something that arose at the end of the apostles age and then very much multiplied in the following generations and it came to be a view that theologians now refer to as doketism.

It's from a Greek word *dokeo* which means to be like something or to seem to be something. And what these people were saying was that Jesus Christ didn't actually have a real human nature. [ 28 : 03 ] He wasn't really human. He just seemed to be human. They didn't deny his divine nature necessarily but what they were saying is God and human nature cannot combine in one person because that will defile God.

So the body that Jesus was visible in was just seemingly human but not properly not really human. And that came to be known as *doketism* or *doketicism*. And as you find down through the ages certain heresies as they arose called great theologians who were true to God to actually then specify and put together in various statements and creeds the truth about such issues. Because if you deny the real humanity the full humanity of Jesus you're actually then involved not just in a different gospel but in no gospel at all.

You take away things that are absolutely crucial and fundamental you don't have the gospel left. You take away any of those foundational planks to the gospel and the whole thing just sinks. [ 29 : 29 ] And you can see that really from the way Paul wrote to the Galatians for example. You remember how annoyed he was that they had so soon given way to opinions other than those that he himself had taught them.

Verses six to seven of the first chapter of Galatians. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel not that there is another one but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. You take away the deity of Christ. You take away the divinity or the humanity of Christ. You could take away substitutionary atonement. You can leave everything else in place but you don't have a gospel.

You don't have the good news. The truth that God has revealed to us of salvation. That's why John is insisting these people are deceivers.

Now it seems very harsh. Almost really self-righteous. And on our part today that's one of the difficulties in a world where there's so much instant communication and so much interaction and things are publicized so soon and very often distorted as well but it's difficult in that situation to actually denounce false teaching and not be accounted a bigot or old-fashioned or just simply out of touch.

[ 31 : 08 ] But John is saying what's actually at stake is the gospel. It's not just a point here and there of theology.

It's the gospel itself. These people he said went out from us. They denied the real humanity of Christ.

Therefore they belong to the deceiver and the antichrist. People ask the question still is the Pope the antichrist?

As far as John is concerned there are many antichrists. And one way of defining an antichrist is somebody who denies something vital to the person of Jesus like his humanity or his deity. That person says John is an antichrist. That person is contrary to the gospel to the truth of God. And that person in promoting such views is actually undermining undermining the gospel and in fact essentially destroying it.

[ 32 : 13 ] And it has to be denounced and denounced clearly and even if it seems severe to do so that's what John is actually doing. It's far more dangerous isn't it to have distortions arising from within the church.

That's why he says here watch yourselves in verse 8. Be careful about these things. The better you know the truth the more equipped you are against untruth and against error.

Remember how Paul wrote well he spoke rather as recorded in Acts in the account Luke has given us in Acts of this very emotional event that took place when Paul in Acts chapter 20 said goodbye to the elders of Ephesus.

They weren't going to see him again in this life and he wasn't going to see them and they knew that. And he then reminded them of how he had lived amongst them, how he had served the Lord, how he had with all humility and with tears and trials he didn't shrink from declaring anything that was profitable and teaching to you in public, testifying both to the Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God.

how he said I'm going to Jerusalem constrained by the spirit and so on. And then he went on to say that he did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God.

[ 33 : 47 ] Therefore he says pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock of God over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood.

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in amongst you not sparing the flock and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore be alert remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears and then he commended them to the word to God and to the word of his grace to the truth that God had revealed.

Now you see that's very difficult that must have been extremely difficult because Paul was not just saying an emotional farewell to these elders that he was now leaving to take charge of the flock of God at Ephesus that was difficult enough but he had to tell them what God had revealed to him that from amongst their own group from among themselves in days to come there would arise false shepherds deceivers people who would twist the truth and draw disciples after them and that's why he admonished them that's why John is doing the same watch yourselves watch yourselves so that you may not lose what we have worked for that doesn't mean you can't possibly lose your salvation what he's emphasizing is what you are involved in is worth continuing in the truth therefore watch that you are not taken away from that that you're not deceived that you don't let in the kind of teaching that would damage you and your relationship with God or between one another and then he goes on to to say watch yourselves everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of

Christ does not have God now there's a telling comment if ever there was one there's something that's very relevant to the modern ideas you have of what the gospel is and what salvation is and what we should believe about God because here is John talking about still talking about these deceivers those who he says here have gone on ahead the people who have turned certain features of the gospel around or emptied it of certain things that are no longer palatable to people they would talk about themselves as being very progressive liberal theologians are very progressive people and they regard people like ourselves who accept the Bible as it is who believe it as the very truth of God as to be very backward very primitive almost compared to the progressiveness of such theology that has moved ahead of literal interpretations of the Bible or literal inspiration of the Bible by God but John is having none of that none of this progressive stuff because for him if you move ahead of what God has revealed with your own ideas with changing or altering the truth itself in the gospel you've actually not progressed at all because you don't have

[ 37 : 43 ] God you've gone so far ahead in your progressiveness that you've left God behind and that's really solemn isn't it that somebody would genuinely believe that they were serving God by coming with very different ideas as to what constitutes the gospel and what constitutes salvation and how we come to have a right relationship with God and they've left God behind they've progressed in their own thoughts beyond the gospel as God has given it they do not he says have God everyone who goes on and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God but whoever does has both the father and the son and he gives a final warning there if anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching don't receive him into your house that could be the house in which they gather for worship or maybe a private house we can't say for sure but what it's really saying is don't receive him into your house or give him any greeting for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works you cannot combine the truth with anything else that's contrary to it you cannot give encouragement to any system of belief that opposes the truth of God in Christ you cannot say that they are equivalent you cannot say that all religions are the same that they all lead to the same place eventually they don't

I am the way said Jesus the truth and the life no one comes to the father but except by me watch yourselves if anyone comes and doesn't bring this teaching don't encourage them don't suggest for a moment that you're supportive of them don't give them any leeway whatever to think that they have your support of what they believe because says John they belong to the deceiver to the antichrist to the movement that opposes the gospel and is contrary to God's truth faithful in truth and love walking in the truth walking in love walking faithfully three very important precepts and they'll always be important precepts for as long as Christians need to live in an unbelieving world which will always be the case until the world ends let's pray let's pray lord our god we thank you for the truth revealed to us the truth as it is in Jesus the truth that's in his own person that truth which he

revealed and now comes to us in regard to your salvation we pray lord for faithfulness on our part so that we will adhere to your truth that we will seek to present your truth with zeal to the world knowing the many species of unbelief and of untruth that abound in it lord help us we pray to be true to the gospel true to your revelation true to your commands true to the practice that you call upon us to set in motion each day in all of these things lord we pray that you would receive the glory and the praise that it will be to the extending of your kingdom the glorifying of your name here as we pray for jesus sake amen