

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

2 John | Truth Matters

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INTRODUCTION

Before we look at the book of 2 John, I want to begin by looking at one of the most important conversations that has ever taken place in the history of the world.

Two thousand years ago, on the week of the Passover celebration, a group of religious leaders in Jerusalem accused a Jewish teacher from Nazareth of blasphemy.¹ Their accusations were false, but either they were too blind to see the truth, or they just didn't care. There was a garden just a little way away from the city walls of Jerusalem where this teacher liked to spend time in prayer. It was there in the garden that a troop of Jewish guards arrested Him, tied Him up, and led Him away to be tried in a Jewish court in the middle of the night (*which was illegal for at least a dozen reasons*).² Finally, after the prisoner had been physically abused, falsely accused, and illegally tried, the Jews brought Him to the Roman governor who had been stationed in the land because they knew that he had the authority to put this man to death.³ Standing there in the judgment hall of the governor's house,⁴ these two men had one of the most important conversations in the history of the world.

The Roman governor's name was **Pilate**. And the name of the prisoner was **Jesus**.

There, on this floor of human judgment, Pilate looked into the eyes of the Son of God, the Creator of the world, and he asked Jesus if He was "*the King of the Jews*" (**John 18:33**). Jesus answered,

My kingdom is not of this world.
If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight,
so that I should not be delivered to the Jews;
But now My kingdom is not from here.
~ John 18:36

So, Pilate responded, "*Are You a king then?*" (John 18:37).

Jesus answered,

¹ Matthew 26:63–66.

² [What was illegal about this trial?](#) **1.** He was arrested by the very ones who were set up to judge Him (John 18:3–5, 8; Luke 22:52). **2.** The initial trial was conducted privately, in the middle of the night, by somebody who had no authority (John 18:12–13, 19–23). **3.** The proceeding trial (conducted by the Sanhedrin) was also illegally held before sunrise. **4.** There were no witnesses present to testify on behalf of the accused. The law required at least one of the members to serve as a defense council. Furthermore, it appears that those members who may have testified on His behalf (e.g., Joseph, Nicodemus) had not been notified of the trial (Luke 23:50–51). **5.** It was illegal to try a capital offense on a day before an annual Sabbath. **6.** The trial concluded in a single day, giving no opportunity for any witnesses to present testimony on behalf of the accused. **7.** The accusers produced no supporting evidence, and there was no investigation into the false testimony that was provided. **8.** The high priest tore his clothes (which was illegal, Lev. 21:10; 10:6) in what proved to be a move that further incited the prejudice of everyone else in the court (Matt 26:65; Mark 14:63). **9.** The court took place in the high priest's house instead of in the legally appointed place. **10.** The majority of the court members were legally disqualified to try this case. The Jewish historian, Josephus, notes that many were recipients of bribes, appointed by family members, ex-high priests, and known enemies of the accused. **11.** They illegally switched the charges from blasphemy to treason (Luke 23:2).

³ John 18:31.

⁴ John 18:33–38.

You say rightly that I am a king.
For this cause I was born, and **for this cause** I have come into the world,
that I should bear witness to the truth.
Everyone who is of the **truth** hears My voice.
~ *John 18:37*

Jesus said that He came into this world for this purpose: *to bear witness to the truth.*

How does Pilate respond?

Pilate said to Him,
“*What is truth?*”
~ *John 18:38*

As you read this story, one of the incredible things you notice is that as soon as Pilate asks this profoundly important question, he leaves. **He doesn’t wait around for an answer.** The Bible says that “*when he had said this, he went out...*” (**John 18:38**). **Why?**

Q. **Why** does Pilate leave the room immediately after asking Jesus “what is truth”?

A. Because Pilate doesn’t think there is an answer to this question.

When Pilate says, “What is truth?”, he doesn’t seem to be asking a question.

Rather, he seems to be confessing that he doesn’t believe there is such a thing as truth.

- There is legal & illegal, acceptable & unacceptable, advantageous & disadvantageous...
- There is preference, religion, morals, ethics, standards, power, control ...

But **truth**...? “*What is truth?*” *Why do you care about truth? Even if there is such a thing as truth, what does it matter when your life is on the line?*⁵ Pilate was asking Jesus the same question that the world is still asking today: *why do you care about truth?* That’s the **THEME** of **2 John**.

CONTEXT

- 2 John is the **second-shortest book** in the Bible.⁶
- Written by the **apostle John** – who was now **an old man**.
- At the time he wrote this little letter, John was probably **the only apostle still alive**.⁷
- He identifies himself as “**the Elder**” (2 John 1).⁸ He probably isn’t making reference to his age; rather, it is more likely that he is highlighting his God-given responsibility as a **spiritual leader** in the church. He was a **beloved disciple** of Jesus. He was part of the **inner circle**. He was there on the mountain when Jesus **transfigured** to reveal His glory. He was there at **the cross** when Jesus gave up His life. And he was there in **the tomb** on Sunday morning, staring at the place where there should have been a dead body, *but there wasn’t!* And he was there as Jesus **ascended** into heaven. As the only remaining apostle still alive, John (no doubt) feels a **unique responsibility** toward the church that was Jesus Christ was building.⁹

⁵ Why care about truth when your life is on the line – or when your job is on the line – or when your relationship is on the line – or when your grade is on the line. When it felt to **Peter** like his life was on the line, he abandoned truth and denied that he knew Jesus (**Luke 22:45–62**).

⁶ The only book shorter than 2 John is 3 John!

⁷ All the other apostles had been **martyred** for their testimony to **the truth**.

⁸ 2 John 1 “**Ὁ πρεσβύτερος**”.

⁹ Matt 17:1–9; 26:36–38; Mark 9:2–3; Luke 8:49–56; John 13:23; 19:26–27; 20:2; 21:7, 20.

We read that John wrote this little letter to “*the elect lady and her children*” (2 John 1).

- Nobody knows for sure who this elect lady and her children are.
 - Some scholars (e.g., MacArthur) take this literally. They believe that John was probably writing this letter to a specific Christian woman and her children.
 - Other scholars (e.g., Dever) tend to think that John was writing to a local church – and that he was using the same kind of imagery that he uses to describe the church in Revelation¹⁰ (which is also the kind of imagery that the apostle Paul used).¹¹
- If John is referring to a local church and those who have come to faith in Jesus through her testimony (i.e., “her children”), then he closes the letter by sending a greeting from a sister church. This understanding also helps make more sense of **verse 10**.
- But whoever John wrote this letter for, what really matters is the message that John was communicating to them, which is this: **truth really matters**.

“What is truth?” It’s the difference between life & death.

PURPOSE

The **PURPOSE** of this letter is to encourage God’s chosen people to *cling* to the truth of **Jesus Christ** and to *never compromise* on the truth no matter what.¹²

John knew that that (even in the first century) there was a temptation to *compromise* on truth in the name of “love” and “tolerance”. He knew that Christians would struggle with a temptation to tolerate false doctrines and false religions and false teachers – all in the name of love.

More specifically, there would be a temptation to show loving **hospitality** to those who were actively seeking to destroy the truth of Jesus – by welcoming them into their homes & into their churches

In John’s first letter (which Matt preached last week), John wrote about people who had left the church – because they were never truly part of the church (1 John 2:19), and he warned that these people were now spreading false teachings about Jesus (1 John 2:18–23). **They were saying that Jesus never actually came in the flesh – that God never actually became a human being.** Now why is that so problematic? Because if Jesus didn’t actually take on flesh and blood, then we don’t have a Savior because “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”¹³

John is concerned that this “lady and her children” will **open up their homes and their pulpits and their lives to these false teachers**, and he wants to make sure they understand that, **although this may feel like a loving thing to do, it’s not**.

To give aid to those who are actively teaching lies about the gospel of Jesus *isn’t love; it’s betrayal*.

- If there is a group of **terrorists** running around your community shooting people, and you invite them to come into your home to share a meal with them and to give them a place to sleep, it’s not an act of love. It’s betrayal. It’s sharing in their evil.¹⁴
- The same is true of those who would destroy souls with false teachings about Jesus.

As I recite this little letter, I want you to listen to how John elevates the importance of truth.

¹⁰ I.e., John refers to the church as a bride that has made herself ready (Rev 19:7–9; 21:1–2).

¹¹ Paul refers to the church as the “bride of Christ” Eph 5:25–27; 2 Cor 11:2.

¹² 2 John 2 “διὰ (for, because of) τὴν ἀλήθειαν (the truth).”

¹³ Heb 9:22.

¹⁴ The legal term for this is “aiding & abetting”.

RECITE 2 JOHN

If I had to boil the message of 2 John down to one sentence, it would be: truth really matters. If you are committed sharing the good news of Jesus with people, you will almost certainly run into people who say that **truth doesn't really matter**. You'll hear something like, "All the world really needs is love" (if you grew up in the 1960's, you've heard that sentence before!).

- "Doctrines doesn't really matter."¹⁵ "Theology doesn't really matter."
- "Truth doesn't really matter." "What matters is love."

We live in a culture that seems to think we have to choose between love and truth – as if genuine love is incompatible with hard truth. Our culture says that if you truly love people, you won't confront them with truth.¹⁶

Illustration: you've probably seen the bumper sticker that uses a bunch of different religious symbols to spell the word "**Coexist**". *What does this mean?* It means, don't worry about what other people believe about God or Jesus or salvation. Just let them believe whatever makes them happy, and they'll let you believe whatever makes you happy.

- "Why can't we just agree to get along and let people believe their own version of truth?"
- "What's true for you is true for you, and what's true for me is true for me."
- "So, you keep your truth to yourself, and I'll keep my truth to myself. And we will just agree to love each other."

Now, that might sound really good to you, but that's just not the way truth works – anywhere. It's not the way truth works *in general*,¹⁷ and it's not the way truth works *when it comes to God*.

- Either *the Bible* is the Word of God, or it's not. Either Jesus is *God incarnate*, or He isn't.
- Either God will *judge* sinners, or He won't. Either *Heaven & Hell* are real, or they aren't.
- Either Jesus is *the only way* to be saved, or He isn't.
- Either He is *coming back* for His people, or He isn't.

And if you believe that these things are true, then the most unloving thing you could do would be to let other people go on believing whatever they want. Love demands that we not only share our beliefs with others, but that we implore them to receive it as the truth. And love demands that we not actively accommodate or support or encourage those who are actively teaching or believing a false gospel.

Illustration: imagine that you and I are taking a hike on the North Superior Hiking Trail, and I start down a path that you know drops off into a deep canyon. If you care about me at all, what will you do? You will quickly warn me about the path that I am taking. Now, imagine that I respond to your warning by saying, "No, I think this path leads to a beautiful waterfall."

What do you do? *Heaven forbid that you impose your beliefs on me. I mean, who are you to tell me that I'm wrong and that your right. What kind of intolerant prick would you have to be to say that your way is better than mine. How intolerant of you! Why can't I just believe what I believe, and you believe what you believe – and we just agree to disagree? Maybe this path is dangerous for you, but I think it's going to be beautiful for me.*

In this scenario, the only way for you to truly love me is with truth. I don't need good vibes. I don't need your emotional support. I don't need your tolerance. **I need truth**. You will either give me love and truth, or you won't give me either; because you cannot truly love me without giving me the truth.

¹⁵ On this logic, books aren't important. Preaching isn't essential. Seminaries are a waste of time and money. Etc.

¹⁶ This past week I was interacting with a guy who was arguing that it is unloving for a parent to **discipline their children** (which is exactly the opposite of what the Bible says in **Proverbs 13:24**).

¹⁷ Like, either the earth is round or it's not. Either the sun is at the center of the solar system, or it's not. Either two plus two equals four, or it doesn't. Truth isn't relative in general, and it's certainly not relative in salvation.

And if you support me in my journey down a path that you know will eventually lead to me death, then your friendship and hospitality were the cruelest forms of **betrayal** – because you led me to believe that my choices were okay when you knew that I was walking to my death.

And this is what it's like with the truth of the gospel. Yes, love is important. The Bible says:

- The greatest commandment is **love**...¹⁸
- They will know we are followers of Jesus by our **love**...¹⁹
- Without love, we cannot know God because God is **love**...²⁰

But what is equally true is that, in God's economy, *there is no such thing as love without truth*. The point of **1 John** is to emphasize the Biblical message that truth really does matter.

Think for a moment about what the Bible says about our relationship with truth...

- We **worship** the “God of truth”²¹
- Who always **speaks** the truth²²
- **Jesus** is the truth²³
- He **spoke** the truth²⁴
- **Testified** to the truth²⁵
- The **Holy Spirit** is the Spirit of truth²⁶
- God's truth is **eternal**²⁷
- **Salvation** comes from faith in the truth²⁸
- Believers are **sanctified** by the truth²⁹
- We are called to **love** the truth³⁰
- The truth is what **sets us free**³¹
- We **worship** in truth³²
- **Rejoice** in truth³³
- **Meditate** on the truth³⁴
- **Obey** the truth³⁵
- **Guided** by the truth³⁶
- And we **walk** in the truth³⁷

¹⁸ Matthew 22:36–37

¹⁹ **John** 13:35

²⁰ **1 John** 4:8

²¹ Ps 31:5; Isa 65:16

²² 2 Sam 7:28; Num 23:19; Titus 1:2

²³ **John** 14:6; Eph 4:21

²⁴ **John** 8:45–46

²⁵ **John** 18:37

²⁶ **John** 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6

²⁷ Ps 117:2

²⁸ 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25

²⁹ **John** 17:17

³⁰ 2 Thess 2:10

³¹ **John** 8:32

³² **John** 4:23–24

³³ 1 Cor 13:6

³⁴ Phil 4:8

³⁵ 1 Peter 1:22

³⁶ Ps 25:5; 43:3

³⁷ 1 Kings 2:4; 3:6; 2 Kings 20:3; Ps 26:3; 86:11

Truth really matters!

- It matters that you **know** who Jesus is (9).
 - That He is God in the flesh. That, through the miracle of the **incarnation**, God became flesh and dwelt among us. That God the Son took on our humanity so that He could pay the price for our sin by **dying in our place**. That His body was **physically broken** and that His blood was **physically shed**. That He **conquered the grave** by rising again three days later. That He **appeared** to His followers. That He **ascended** into Heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father. And that He is **coming back** to take His people home to be with Him forever.
- It matters that you believe **the Word** that He has given us.
- It matters that you **walk** according to the truth that you have heard in His Word from the beginning (6).
- It matters that you “**love in truth**” and *with truth* (1).
- It matters **because** the truth of Jesus isn’t going anywhere! *It will be with us forever* (2).

Truth never changes:

- Societies change.
- Cultural opinions fluctuate.
- Nations rise and fall.
- Trends come and go.
- Fashion is in, and then it’s out. 😊³⁸
- Public approval waxes and wanes.

But truth doesn’t work that way. Truth remains the same – forever... regardless of how the world around it changes. Jesus said:

“Heaven and earth will pass away,
but **My words** will by no means pass away.”³⁹
~ *Luke 21:33*

- We may have figured out new methods of **transportation** (*like how to get people to the moon or how to drive a car without gasoline*), but there is still only way to get to heaven.

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
~ *John 14:6*

- That hasn’t changed. That hasn’t progressed. And it never will.

- We may have figured out how to *alter* the **sexual biology** of a person or how to genetically *modify* the **genes** of a baby in the womb, but our **bioscientific advancements** do not change what it means to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

People might say, “*Oh come on! After how far we have progressed, you still believe that **old** book? You still believe that **old** message that Jesus is the only way? You’re so **old** fashioned.*”

- Some people have this idea that because the doctrine of the Bible is old, that (therefore) it is no longer **valid** – or **relevant** – or **true** ... because it’s “old fashioned”.
 - Just because something is old doesn’t mean that it’s not still gloriously true.

³⁸ When I was in college, I had a perm because I thought it was fashionable! 😊

³⁹ See also: Psalm 119:89

CONCLUSION

Pilate scoffed when Jesus said that he came to bear witness to the truth.
And we live in a world that scoffs when Christians bear witness to the truth.

We live in a culture which says that love and tolerance are more important than truth – that truth really doesn't matter just so long as we just love one another... but that's just not true.

John wrote this little letter to say that love and truth must go together. We need both.

- Truth without love is just cold, harsh legalism, *and it destroys souls*.⁴⁰
- Love without truth is wishy-washy emotionalism, *and that destroys souls*.⁴¹
 - Love the truth.⁴²
 - Hold onto truth.⁴³
 - Walk in the truth.⁴⁴
 - Don't compromise on the truth.⁴⁵
 - Live your life in truth.⁴⁶
 - Guard the truth.⁴⁷

APPLICATION

1. Read **books** that fill your mind with truth.
2. Listen to **music** that fills your soul with truth.
3. Make sure that your **television** is not an open door for false teaching in your home.
4. Spend time **fellowshipping** with people who build you up in the truth.
5. Become an active member of a local **church** that celebrates “the doctrine of Christ” (9).
6. **Memorize** Scripture.
7. Whenever God gives you the opportunity, **speak** the truth in love.

⁴⁰ See 1 Cor 13:1–3

⁴¹ See Rom 1:18–32

⁴² 2 John 1

⁴³ Prov 23:23

⁴⁴ 2 John 4

⁴⁵ 2 John 7–8

⁴⁶ 2 John 9

⁴⁷ 2 John 10–11