

## 2 John Truth: The Root of Love

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro  
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This morning we continue our look at Little Letters to Normal People: 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> John and Philemon, three short letters that were included in the Bible.

We're looking at 2 John this morning. At just 13 verses, it's the shortest book in the English Bible. There is no 2 John Chapter 2. So it's a Little Letter and we're going to read the whole thing this morning.

And these Little Letters were written to Normal People - people who were probably surprised a letter written to them wound up in the Bible. 3 John is written to a man in the church by the name of Gaius, not a pastor, just a member. Philemon, which we'll look at next week, is the same.

2 John though is written to "the elect lady" and there's some difference of opinion about her identity - some think she was a real woman, one lady. Others think that this was code for a church because sometimes the references to the lady are singular and sometimes they're plural. Others say maybe it was one lady who had opened up her home for a church to meet in. I'm inclined to go with the latter.

But for certain, there are two main points. John is writing an encouragement to keep walking in truth and love and he's sending a warning about endorsing or assisting the ministries of those who don't accept the doctrines of Christ. Let's take a look:

### 1 The Elder,

To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, 2 because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:

3 Grace, mercy, *and* peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

You can tell immediately that truth and love are very important to John, right? And you can see that the two are closely related. So let's talk about that.

John says I love you "in truth," and others who "know the truth" love you, and you receive "grace, mercy, and peace" from God because of the "truth and love." There's this constant connection between the two.

That's interesting because we often lean toward one or the other. Maybe you naturally lean toward an emphasis on truth. You just want to know the facts, you want the data, you're not very emotional, you're not a hugger or a crier. You just do what has to be done. You don't like girly movies or things that pull on your heartstrings; you think that's all soft and maybe even manipulative. And so, maybe you major in truth and minor in love.

Or maybe you're the opposite; maybe you're a softy. You just love people. You want to know how they're doing, what they're going through, how they feel. You think about the way a decision or an action will affect others. You don't want to see anyone hurt. You care what people think and you care what they think about you. You major in love, but, and maybe you don't think about it exactly this way, but you minor in truth. People can take advantage of you, lead you astray, and unscrupulous people can manipulate you if you follow your heart instead of your head. You'll go with the flow to keep the peace.

You probably know marriages where one person is a lover and the other is a truther. One thinks with their mind all the time and the other with their heart.

I've seen families with children like that. If a disagreement flares up, one child would rather prove they are right than preserve a relationship with you and the other just wants the whole thing to go away so you can all get back to being friends.

But I want you to notice that John isn't saying that one is any better than the other. He's not making a case for love at the expense of truth, or vice versa. In fact, what John is making a very strong and clear case for here is for love that is rooted and grounded in truth. A head and a heart that are vitally connected.

He says in verse one that he and others "love" the lady "in the truth." Truth should always be the basis for love.

But that's not always the way it turns out, is it? In dating relationships we try to put our best foot forward, we try to present our best self – we're trying to get someone to love *who we wish we were*, but what we need is someone to love *the truth of who we really are*.

And so, relationships often start off with an initial attraction that we call infatuation – it's not true love, it's just a very strong emotional and maybe physical attraction. That's not entirely bad, but, as you get to know each other, things have to transition and change from a merely impulsive attraction to a settled commitment based on a determined decision to love in truth. To love, no matter what. To be the last man standing when everything else in that other person's life falls apart.

Love without truth can be a snare for parents and children too. Parents, if you aren't careful you can wind up falling in love with an idea of who you want your children to be when it's not the truth of who they are. Some of you children, whether you're teens or whether you've grown up entirely know what it is to have a parent who wants to love you for being or doing something you're not. And you wish they would love in truth instead; that they would love you for who you are, not who they wish you were or think you are.

We all want to be loved, but real love requires truth. None of us really want to be loved for what we're not – it creates too much tension because we're all afraid of what will happen when you find out what I'm really like.

Fortunately, the good news is, God does love us in truth. He knows exactly who and what we are. He knows all the areas where we blow it, He knows what we've been up to, He knows what we struggle with. He knows the areas where we're not quite good enough, or smart enough, He knows what we look like naked in the mirror. He knows the truth about us in every detail, and He still loves us!

Now, don't get me wrong, there are plenty of things about us that He wants to change. There's a difference between love and acceptance. I don't have to accept everything about you to love you. That's a false idea of love which we'll talk more about in a moment. But my point is: you're not able to hide anything from God and He still loves you *in truth*.

Are you thankful for that? Do you have an open relationship with Him, or are you still trying to deny or explain or hide certain things? He wants to have everything out in the open with you and for you to be able to confess and admit things and for Him to be able to speak directly to you about things in truth, because He loves you.

Which brings me to the next point I want to make here about truth: it can be known. Again, in verse 1 John says that he and others who have “[known the truth](#)” love the lady who is receiving this letter.

Friends, truth can be known. There are people out there in the world today who aren't really sure about that. You have whole branches of philosophy that wonder whether things can really be known and whether words really have meaning, whether it's really possible for me to know you and communicate with you. You've got people studying epistemology and theories of linguistics asking “what does meaning even mean?” Meanwhile, the Bible very clearly says, truth can be known, more than that, when truth is known, it becomes the basis for love.

Throughout the Bible you find an emphasis on truth. People are even called liars in the Bible. In a few verses John will call some people deceivers. The Bible is very concerned about truth and it's impact on our lives. We can't “love” people and have no regard for truth. We need to know the truth and then take action on the basis of that truth.

And John sees nothing wrong with speaking authoritatively on the issue of truth. In our culture we're afraid of being absolute about anything – how often do you hear yourself or others saying Well, I think, or I feel like, instead of saying “I know.”

John knows the truth and he's about to speak it into this woman's life – whoever she is, about a certain situation. She's not a member of his church, she's not his wife or sister or mom, but he speaks truth to her because he loves her. He says hard things. Do we?

Without prying, without controlling or meddling, do we speak the truth in love or do we let things roll by?

Friends, do you *know* the truth? When you face a new or confusing situation, where do you look for truth? Do you go to the Scriptures and ask God for guidance, or do you think you need to do a Google search or buy a book or ask a friend? Now, none of those things are wrong. And the Bible certainly doesn't have the answers to all your math problems or the coding or networking mess you're trying to solve at work, but it is full of the kind of fundamental truths that undergird all of life. Do you turn to it? Do you prioritize it?

Proverbs 9: 10 "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom,  
And the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding.  
11 For by me your days will be multiplied,  
And years of life will be added to you.

And of course, the most important truth we can know is not a fact but a person. Jesus said:

John 14:6 "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no one comes to the Father but by Me."

John probably had that in mind when he wrote in 2 John verse 2 "*the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever.*" Because truth is true it endures. It doesn't change. Our culture and our nation have changed a LOT in the past few years. But truth doesn't. It can be hard to keep up with the latest and greatest and what's next and what's happening over where and what's going on with whom, but the key, fundamental things of the universe do not change, they abide.

And of course, that's most true of our need for salvation through Christ and the enduring effect it has on us. As we receive Christ, He promises to dwell or abide with us forever and to have a profound impact on us as a result. You're navigating your way through life and the scenery all around you keeps changing but your eternal destination and your eternal navigator never do, so cultivate that relationship with Him and allow Him to show you how to handle each situation as it comes along. He'll show you how to know the truth, abide in the truth, and love people as a result.

Notice that John says:

3 Grace, mercy, *and* peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Truth, together with love, forms the delivery mechanism for your experience of grace, mercy, and peace from God. You can't have mercy without truth. Mercy says you deserve something else – that's truth - but I'm giving you this instead. As we said earlier, God knows the truth about us and still loves us. That's the kind of love you want! You don't want the kind of love you have to earn by studying hard and finally becoming a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer, or by maintaining a strict diet so you're able to fit into those certain

jeans, or by being a great athlete or whatever. You don't want to have to earn conditional love – you want someone who will love you in truth and when you don't measure up or keep up or when you aren't given the next step up, they'll show you grace, mercy, and peace and love you no matter what.

Friends, we hope for that kind of love from one another – John says he loves the elect lady, he wants to show her this kind of treatment, unfortunately we're all human and we're going to fail despite our best efforts. But God is perfect and He can and will love us this way in Christ – He will, and He does, love us in truth. And then, as we experience this love from Him, we can ask Him for the strength and wisdom to be able to show it to others.

That process – of learning from God and then showing to others is exactly what we find John commending in the lives of the lady's children:

**4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.**

Apparently John has come across some of this lady's children. Maybe they were coming through town and visited him, or maybe he was out traveling and they bumped into each other, it's hard to say. And maybe these were her literal children, or maybe they were spiritual children – Christians she had disciplined or members of the same church. Either way, it fits because what John is expressing is true – there is joy in finding that those you've had direct influence on are walking in truth.

Parents always want the best for their kids – it might not seem like it when you are the kid, but even the most despicable parent generally has a desire for the child to become better than mom or dad. So kids, if you ever feel like you wish mom or dad would just leave you alone, I want you to know and remember, the reason they're so concerned is that they want you to do better – they want to get a report one day that you're walking well in the truth. But parents, they're not puppets, you can't control them with your strings, their walk has to spring naturally out of their own lives – teach, admonish, encourage, but don't smother or be over-controlling.

And those of you who are raising spiritual children – pastors, ministry leaders, Christian whoever you are that is discipling others – keep passing on the truth you have received from the Father and keep loving and praying for those spiritual children – one day you will see or hear from others that they're walking in the truth and it will encourage your soul as well.

Well, now that we've established the foundation of truth in love, we move on to John's specific encouragement for the lady:

**5 And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. 6 This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.**

Can I remind you that John is writing this little letter to a normal person to encourage her to keep walking in love and truth. John was there when they asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment and He said: it's to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. That's the over arching message and everything else is just an explanation or clarification of how to do that in given circumstances. But Jesus said if you focus on loving God with all you've got and showing that love to others as well, in the process essentially you'll be fulfilling all the other commandments as well.

But it has to be love in truth. It can't just be some fuzzy quasi-spiritual notion of who God is and what love is. It has to be Biblical love and the Biblical God – love bounded by the truths of Scripture.

It's interesting to me that John has to encourage her to keep going in this love. It's interesting, and honestly, encouraging for me, to hear him say, "I plead with you."

Look, if doing this was easy, if showing God's love to others was easy, you wouldn't have to plead with anyone to do it. Would you? But if what we're talking about is truth and love - it's going to be hard. It's going to be hard to love someone enough to speak the truth into their life. And it's going to be hard to know the truth about someone and still love them, isn't it?

John knows it's hard, and that's why he's writing these things.

Meanwhile other people have tried to take an easy way out by changing some core Christian doctrines in order to make things a little easier to bear. They're trying to soften the edges a little bit so Christianity is still attractive but not quite so uncomfortable at times, and now John is going to warn the elect lady about them:

7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. 8 Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward. 9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

Here we discover one of the reasons why John sent this little postcard – it was to warn the lady about some deceivers – people who liked a lot of what Christianity had to offer, but who rejected some core aspects of the truth about Christ. They wanted the love without the truth.

Maybe they said He was a good teacher, a good rabbi, a good moral instructor, maybe they said He taught SOME truth, but they didn't accept Him as THE truth. You know, this is probably the majority view of the world today. You know that Muslims believe in Jesus

don't you? They say He was a wonderful prophet – He had SOME great things to say, but He wasn't God in the flesh. He wasn't divine.

Most people you meet on the street or at work would say the same thing – “Sure, Jesus taught some great things, He had some great things to say, He was a great teacher. But you can't really trust everything in the Bible,” they say. He wasn't really God they say. He may have been crucified, but it was just a tragedy they say, His death doesn't really have an impact on us, it doesn't make atonement for our sins they say. We've gotten things all wrong and we just need to be inspired by His example.

You see, both the fervent Muslim and the casual spiritual person have a notion of God, but they reject the truth of Christ. They think they can have God without having Jesus. But John says,

**9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.**

You cannot have God without Jesus, but if you have Jesus, you automatically have the Father as well. Why? Because the entire reason Jesus came was to save us from the sin that separates us from the Father. God is holy and we are not, we sin. On purpose and on accident. So Jesus came to save us from the mess of our sin and make it possible for us to have a relationship with God.

People want God without Jesus because they want love without truth. The Bible tells us God is love, and Jesus says He is the truth. And as we've been saying this morning you can't have one without the other – we need both. We need love, but we also need to know that the only way to really have it is to honestly confront the realities of who we are and we've done and what we're doing. If someone doesn't know the truth about us, we can never be really sure they actually love us because we're always afraid, if they learn the truth, will they still love me?

Jesus is God's proof that He knows the truth about us and still loves us.

So, John tells the lady, if someone comes your way and they're going around trying to teach spiritual things but they're denying the truth about Jesus, don't help them out in their ministry. Don't encourage them or assist them, don't give them a place to stay or in any way endorse their ministry lest you somehow be a part of drawing others away from a saving knowledge of the truth.

Now, we need to be clear here, John isn't saying you can't have non-believers over to your house. He isn't saying don't invite your Muslim friend or co-worker over for dinner. He's not saying your sister can't come for Thanksgiving because she's not sure what she really believes. He's specifically talking about showing hospitality to people who are intentionally teaching specific doctrines and saying don't endorse their ministry. Don't open your basement up for some cult to stay in while they're going door to door in your



neighborhood. That might be showing them love, but it's at the expense of telling them the truth.

And now he closes up:

12 Having many things to write to you, I did not wish *to do so* with paper and ink;  
but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.  
13 The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

John looks forward to the next time he has to sit down and talk face to face – he says it will be a great time, full of joy. John had this technology at his disposal – he could send someone a message without actually talking to them personally – he could text the lady. Only instead of his message appearing on a screen it appeared on a tablet of papyrus. And he used that technology sometimes, but he said it was no substitute for talking face to face. Just a little something to consider huh?

We're going to have the opportunity to sit down and speak to one another face to face in just a moment over lunch. But first, we're going to celebrate communion together. We're going to celebrate the integration of truth and love that occurred on the cross of Christ by remembering His sacrifice through communion.

So if Matt and the worship team could come forward, and the ushers to distribute the elements, I'd ask you to take this time and consider: do you have an open relationship with God? Are you just here hoping to experience His love without coming face to face with some truth in your life? Do you know that He knows the truth about you? Have you admitted that to Him, or are you still trying to hide certain things? Do you need to come to him and confess anything this morning and receive forgiveness, cleansing and healing through Christ?

Or do you need to receive the love of God this morning? Maybe you know that God knows the truth about you, but you're not really sure He loves you – maybe you think He's just tolerating you. If so, you don't have an accurate understanding of what has happened – the truth is, if you come to God admitting your sins and asking for forgiveness in Christ, He will love you in truth. He loves you because of the truth.

Take some time this morning and either take action on these things, or praise God for these things, and then, maybe, ask for some guidance on how it's all supposed to impact your relationships with others.

Let's pray.