

WALKING IN THE TRUTH**2 John****(Read 2 John)**

Intro: Continuing our study of these little letters that have a big message, Second John is picture of what that series title means. This is the shortest book in the Bible and yet it is packed full of instruction for us as Christ Followers. If there would be a description of what that message is here, it would be the title of the message you see in the worship folder – WALKING IN THE TRUTH.

When people look at you, do they see Jesus in you? I'm not talking about the bumper sticker you have your car that looks like a fish, or the fact that you carry a big Bible with you; I'm talking about whether or not the love and truth of Jesus oozes from your very being. We all know people like this – you just know they're a Christ Follower Just by the sweet spirit they have. Isn't it sad that, far too often, the Christians that make the headlines are the ones who, while they might carry a big Bible, they are thumping it over the heads of or down the throats of people with whom they disagree? This is not witness – this is the opposite – and it is not being Jesus.

Jesus needs to be seen in us. When Peter and John were teaching that Jesus had risen for the dead they were arrested and commanded to divulge by whose power they were teaching. So they told all about Jesus and his resurrection and the transformation that was happening to literally thousands of people. And when they were done, the book of Acts records this, *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.* Acts 4:13. **They took note that they had been with Jesus.** No matter how much schooling you've had, no matter how smart you are, no matter how much money you make – when people hear your words and see your face, do they see that you have been with Jesus? If you've been with Jesus you will have been walking in truth.

Now some short introductory comments and then we'll return to that subject.

As I read this little letter, or perhaps as you've read it in preparation for this morning, you have asked yourself, who is the elder? There are different theories, ranging from an elder in the church in Ephesus, to a bishop, to the same writer as First John, who was very likely the same writer of the Gospel of John, who was in all likelihood, THE Apostle John who was Jesus' beloved disciple. We really don't know for certain since no one, who was there when this was written, is around anymore – it's been 2000 years after all. But it's most likely the same John who wrote the first letter because there are so many common themes, and also the Gospel writer for the same reasons. So I'm putting forward that this elder is THE Elder, John himself – who held great authority and may very well have been, by the time this was written, the only surviving disciple.

And who is the "lady chosen by God"? Well it could be a lady, indeed, who lived in Asia Minor somewhere and was a leader in a church. And it may have been code for a particular meeting, a necessity, as persecution increased. I believe it is THE Church – even though verse 13 which says, *The children of your sister, who is chosen by God, send their greetings,* might imply that different churches were referred to as ladies. Regardless – this message is for the church and that means this letter is to us and that's why it's in the Bible. It's a message we need to hear and we do well to listen carefully to it.

As I said – there are many common themes with First John that were hammered home there. But his letter makes several strong statements that show us how to walk in truth. Let's look at it in our remaining time. One thing we see is that . . .

Love and truth are inseparable

- First look at this word "truth". It occurs five times in the first 4 verses. It's obvious the writer is intending to make a point – this way of Christ is the way of truth. We do well to remember that in this day when there is a cacophony of cries against the way of the Bible.
- Not only that, but Jesus said he IS the truth (John 14:6). We have it straight from God the Son what the truth is. So John begins by saying that he loves the church in the truth. That's a powerful combination – love and truth. In fact I would even say that love and truth is Christianity in two words. Paul tells us in Ephesians that as deceivers try to lead us astray and keep us in the old way of life that we should speak the truth in love. Listen, *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.* Ephesians 4:15.
- It comes down to this, walking in the truth = living the Christian life. And going on . . .

THIS IS NOT A NEW COMMANDMENT

- This isn't a new message John is teaching – it's the one that we have always had. Not only did the theme of love and loving one another come up frequently in First John, but it is all through the Gospel of John. For John, love was the remedy, and that is because it is straight from the healer himself. Didn't Jesus say, *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, if you love one another.* John 13:34-35? Jesus said it first. So John simply says in so many words in verse 5 of our text, "I'm not commanding you, I'm begging you – LOVE ONE ANOTHER! Even though that is probably not the word you find in your English text, it is definitely the implication in the original language. Love one another!"
- So what does that mean? Well, I could go to 1 Corinthians 13, with its often quoted treatise on love, but instead I'll quote what William Barclay says about it. Listen, "*Christian truth tells us the way in which we ought to love. Agape is the word for Christian love. Agape is not passion with its ebb and flow, its flicker and its flame; nor is it an easy-going and indulgent sentimentalism. And it is not an easy thing to acquire or a light thing to exercise. Agape is undefeatable goodwill; it is the attitude towards others which, no matter what they do, will never feel bitterness and will always seek their highest good. There is a love which seeks to possess; there is a love which softens and enervates; there is a love which withdraws a man from the battle; there is a love which shuts its eyes to faults and to ways which end in ruin. But Christian love will always seek the highest good of others and will accept all the difficulties, all the problems and all the toil which that search involves. It is of significance that John writes in love to warn.*"
- That is what we are to do when people get in our face and dare us to hate. That is what we are to do when people would denigrate our Bible and insult our Lord. That is what we are to do because that is what Jesus did and we need to show that we have been with Jesus. The Christian must love because we have been loved first (1 John 4:19) by a loving God who, in the words of the song writer, *looked beyond our fault and saw our need* – and then he saved us.
- Isn't it just better to love anyway? We live in a world where so much hatefulness happens, we need to love with the love of God. About 100 years ago Bobby Vinton sang, "Only love can break a heart, only love can mend it again.", and they're nice words, but they're hogwash. Only agape love can heal a situation where personal relationships are broken. Angry words and criticism are liable to awaken only resentment and hostility; argument and controversy only serve to create chasms of separation; love is the one thing to heal the brokenness and restore the lost relationship.
- So, remembering that commandment, we see that . . .

True love obeys

- If we love God then we obey. But too often obedience is seen as legalistic. So John points out that Jesus said, *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.* John 14:15
- And that means a Christ Follower cannot accept the love of God without showing love to the very humanity God loves. Because God loves us, we must love others with the same generous and sacrificial love. It's what he did. And, we all know, it's easier said than done – but do it we must. And as we do, perhaps we will bring them into the fold. Some are walking in truth and some are not. What is the remedy for those who are not? LOVE THEM!
- And it's a continuous progress – follow his command and walk in love.
- And there is a promise that comes with walking in truth and love – it's back in verse 3 . . .

Grace, mercy and peace WILL be with us

- In every other New Testament letter there is a greeting praying for and requesting grace and peace, but here John promises it for the Christ Follower. One commentator writes, "*John is so sure of the gifts of the grace of God in Jesus Christ that he does not pray that his friends should receive them; he assures them that they will receive them. Here is the faith which never doubts the promises of God in Jesus Christ.*"
- That was important for people who are being persecuted day in and day out. John says hang in there and you will prevail. F. B. Meyer writes "*When Christ is in us, not only are we true in judgement and speech, but we recognize truth wherever it is to be found. No horizon bounds the vision of the true and truth-loving soul. Be true and loving, and you will have a rich heritage of grace, mercy and peace. Love is best shown by obedience.*"

- Then John brings up a familiar theme. He warns us to . . .

Watch out for deceivers

- Yes, he is talking about the Gnostics again. They are deceivers who are deniers. They are people who changed around the reality of Jesus being God and man at the same time. He was concerned not only that the deceivers who were teaching this were saying this, but that anyone who believed it would not have any hope of Christ living in them. Jesus was God's son and the Son was God. Barclay quotes Luther who said of Jesus: "*He ate, drank, slept, waked; was weary, sorrowful, rejoicing; he wept and he laughed; he knew hunger and thirst and sweat; he talked, he toiled, he prayed...so that there was no difference between him and other men, save only this, that he was God, and had no sin.*" This is what the Christ Follower must believe.
- But it is the Gnostics' claim that they were developing Christianity by discovering more truly what it means. And John points out instead that they are destroying Christianity and wrecking the foundation which has been laid and on which everything must be built.
- This still happens. That's the problem with people who come against 2000 years of Christian teaching on any number of things – they are trying to say they have the new and best answers. Joseph Smith did that and now we have millions of people who have fallen into the Mormon Cult and are lost. Yes, lost.
- In Second John, he is a bit more specific as to what these deceivers were teaching. He says in v 9 there is danger in running ahead. These deceivers arrogantly claimed that they were the progressives, to use a modern term. They were higher thinkers who were way out ahead of the pack with their open and adventurous minds. John was a revolutionary himself – that's what got him in trouble with the religious leaders way back when. But he says don't get so far ahead of Jesus that you lose touch with him. Barclay says it like this: "*Here, then, is the great truth. John is not condemning advanced thinking; but he is saying that Jesus Christ must be the touchstone of all thinking and that whatever is out of touch with him can never be right. John would say, "Think—but take your thinking to the touchstone of Jesus Christ and the New Testament picture of him." Christianity is not a nebulous, uncontrolled theosophy; it is anchored to the historical figure of Jesus Christ.*" Know what that means? It means we don't get to change the rules.
- Let me be more specific then. Getting ahead of God (or so you think) happens when:
 - You think you're smarter than God. (explain)
 - Or when you think you can hurry him along. (explain)
 - Or in the words of Julian Love "*Verse 9 is not to be taken as a diatribe against all kinds of progress, but as a warning against that sort of restless instability which never "stays put" in its faith.*" Getting ahead of God might simply mean not ever settling down and letting God be God.
- One more comment about Gnosticism since I will not be covering it in my talk next week. I was reading a piece this past week from our friend and former pastor, Rob Douglass who is now pastoring in Dillsburg, PA. He finished a work begun by Luke Keefer on the subject of heresy which Luke felt was a term that was used too loosely by Christians. It's a great study and I recommend it, but I want to point out something Rob mentioned on the subject of modern Gnosticism because it fits here. He was quoting another theologian who showed that Gnosticism in this day and age can be things like the fascination with angels (explain), returning from the dead stories (explain), and others. I would add to them the so-called prosperity Gospel which is a lie straight from the pit. If there ever was a lie construed to be from the Bible, that is one. We best not get caught up in these things, Church. Let's stick to what is here in the Word.
- Finally, if people persist in false teaching – don't spend time with them. It's hard teaching and seems to fly in the face of the whole idea of agape love, but it doesn't. Truth demands that we avoid falseness. Love demands that we restore. That means we don't leave our hands in the fire when we try to pluck lost people out of it. If they persist in hanging on to the flames, let them go. But love them and pray for them and when you do have contact, only be Jesus to them. Remember the admonishment from Jude – restore them, but avoid the sin lest it stain you too. (Jude 23) John's word for us on the subject of false teaching is don't get drawn into it – if it threatens, leave it.

Conclusion: I need to wrap up. John's closing words are mine too: Hold fast to what you have gained. Keep walking in truth. Always have the love of Jesus. Don't give in to the deceit of this age. That's truth and love in action. Truthfully, what it is, is walking in the truth. Amen.