

Love Grounded in Truth

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[0:00] Tonight we'll do an overview of 2 John.

And you know, 2 John is a short book that has less than 300 words in the original Greek.! But the short letter has a clear and strong message. And that message still applies to us today.

And I just wanted to start by reading the letter all the way through, just like John's original readers would have. So John says, 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, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever, 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.

I rejoice greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth as we have received commandment from the Father. 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. 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. For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.

[1:28] This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we work for, but that we may receive a full reward. 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. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house, nor greet him. For he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

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. The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

So we are going to cover the letter in five sections tonight. We are going to cover the salutations, the commandments, the concern, the caution, and then the conclusion.

So the salutation comes in verses 1-3 and with that we will cover some background about this epistle as well. Let's go ahead and look at 1-3 again just to refresh ourselves there.

[2:35] Let's go ahead and look at the letter in verse 1-3. The author of 2 John has traditionally been assigned to the Apostle John. The author of 2 John has been assigned to the Apostle John.

And there really hasn't been too much debate about that. But you see that the author identifies himself only as the elder.

And this title is not likely a reference to the office of an elder in a local church. But it may be just an affectionate designation for the old man.

So he may be just calling himself the old man here. But because of the similarity in style and content between 1 and 2 John, we have no reason to doubt the Apostle John's authorship of this book.

So remember that John and James, his older brother, were known as the sons of Zebedee. And Jesus gave them the nickname the sons of thunder. And John was one of the three most intimate associates of Jesus along with Peter and James.

[3:46] And he was an eyewitness to and participant in Jesus' earthly ministry. So he's part of the inner circle there. And after Christ's ascension, John became a pillar in the Jerusalem church.

He ministered with Peter until he went to Ephesus. And tradition says that occurred before the destruction of Jerusalem. And from Ephesus he wrote the Gospel of John.

And that was where the Romans exiled him from when they exiled him to the island of Patmos. And of course, besides the Gospel that bears his name in this letter, John also wrote 1 John, 3 John,

and the book of Revelation.

So most likely, John composed this letter around AD 90 to 95 during his ministry at Ephesus in the latter part of his life.

So let's look at the recipients of the letter. It says the elect lady and her children. And the identity of these people is one of the most debated things about this letter.

[4:47] Two primary views exist on that. Some think that the elect lady symbolizes a particular local church while her children then would refer to the members of the congregation.

But the more natural understanding and context, though, is that it refers to a particular woman and her children who were well known to John. And that's the assumption that we're going to make tonight, that John was writing to an actual lady and her kids.

But even if John was writing to a church and its members, the main message of the letter is still the same. Because what John would expect in belief and behavior from a lady and her children, he would also expect from a local church and its members.

And notice that the rest of verse 1 hints at the letter's main theme. Because in the rest of verse 1, John describes the recipients as people whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also those who have known the truth.

So 2 John's theme, then, is that truth is the basis for love. So that's your first spot on the handout. Truth is the basis for love. And you'll see the truth and love combination several times as we go through the rest of the letter tonight.

[6:00] And we could spend all night looking at how the Bible defines truth. I'm going to summarize the definition and then just look at a few supporting scriptures for that. So truth, then, refers to the body of doctrine that's true.

Another way to say it is that it's God's revelation. So that's what fits in that blank there. It's God's revelation, which, of course, is the teaching and commands of scripture. And we see this description throughout the Old and New Testaments both.

So just a few cross-references for you to show that. Deuteronomy 32.4 says this about God. It says, He is the rock. His work is perfect. For all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice. Righteous and upright is He. And then Daniel 10.21 refers to the scripture of truth. And then moving to the New Testament, John 17.17 has these words that Jesus prayed to God the Father.

Jesus said, Sanctify them, meaning believers, by your truth. Then He said, Your word is truth. And also we know that Jesus identified Himself as truth.

[7:16] And we see that in John 14.6. That's the famous verse that says, Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

So another way to say it then is that truth refers to the basics or the fundamentals of the faith. So truth refers to the basics or the fundamentals of the faith.

So now that we know what truth is, let's look at how verse 2 describes the truth. How does verse 2 describe the truth there? Notice it says, the truth abides in us and will be with us forever.

So the gospel that unites John and his readers is personally present because in us could also be translated among us. So the point there is that Christian faith is shared and it's not just a personal conviction.

And then also in verse 2, we see two simple yet important characteristics about the truth. And one is that truth unites us. So truth unites us goes in that blank.

[8:30] And then the second characteristic is that truth is eternal. So truth is also eternal then. And that's why truth becomes the foundation for Christian love.

Let's move on to verse 3 then and check out verse 3 one more time. It says, 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.

So remember that grace refers to God's undeserved favor, love, and forgiveness that frees sinners from the consequences of sin. Mercy then frees us not from the consequences of sin, but from the misery that accompanies it.

And then peace becomes a result of grace and mercy. So that's the important thing to remember.

Notice the progression that grace leads to mercy and grace and mercy lead to peace.

So from whom then do grace and mercy come according to John there? Christ. Yeah, he says from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, right?

[9:45] So by putting God and Jesus on the same level, John is clearly asserting that Jesus is God. And John also exalts Jesus by calling him the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Lord Jesus Christ is not just his first, middle, and last name. They actually have significance for what he represents. Because Lord means that he's the sovereign ruler.

So that's what fits into your blank there is that Lord means that he's the sovereign ruler. Jesus then reflects his humanity because he became human and that was his life or his name here on earth.

So Jesus reflects how he became human and that's his name on earth. And then Christ, of course, is a title for the Messiah who is the fulfillment of prophecy.

So when somebody refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, it's really not just a passing reference. It's encompassing all the elements that Jesus represents.

[10:45] And look at something else in that verse. Does John say that God and Jesus may give us grace, peace, and mercy? He says that we will have grace, peace, and mercy.

And that those things will be with us in truth and love. So I told you we would see that truth and love combination several times. And here it is again already in this verse.

So that covers the letter's salutation. As we move into the body now, John is going to remind us of a commandment. And that commandment is in verses 4 through 6.

And those verses again say, I rejoice greatly and I have found some of your children walking in truth as we have received commandment from the Father. 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.

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. So already, John has mentioned one of the things we must do with the truth.

[11:56] He told us in verse 1 that we must know the truth. And now he adds a second thing we need to do with the truth. It gave him great joy to find some of the people to whom he was writing, walking in the truth, as they had received commandment from God.

And we know that walking in the truth indicates that truth is both what we believe and how we live. So it's doctrine and duty and it's also creed and conduct.

And here's a quote from Vince Hafner. He used to say, what we live is what we believe. Everything else is just religious talk. So the reference to walking in truth there, being a commandment from the Father, perhaps is an allusion to 1 John 3.23.

And in 1 John 3.23, John wrote this. He said, this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he gave us commandments.

Then Jesus, of course, himself emphasized the importance of our conduct. Listen to John 8.31 and 32. They say, then Jesus said to those Jews who believed him, if you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed.

[13:13] And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. So the point of these verses and the cross references is that real disciples are both learners and faithful followers.

So they're more than just learners, they're followers as well. And before we leave verse 4 of 2 John, we need to consider one other thing. Because John says that he's found some of the children walking in truth.

And some commentators assume this means that some children were walking in the truth, but others were not. That's probably reading more into the text than we really should. Because pointing out some obedient people doesn't necessarily mean that the others were disobedient.

It probably just means that John only knew some of them, and he didn't necessarily know all of them. So given the positive and encouraging thrust of verse 4, to think that he's trying to read a negative judgment in there between the lines seems a little bit unnecessary and unwarranted.

So let's move on to verse 5 then, and get reminded what the commandment is. Verse 5 says, 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.

[14:27] So notice how John ties the commandment of truth to the commandment of love. The word love has reference to practicing love as a habit.

And our walk with the Lord is based upon his commandment to love one another. And John likely is reminding his readers about what Jesus said in John 13, 35.

John 13, 35 is where Jesus said, By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. If we have any doubt what John means by love, the next verse in 2 John defines it. Check out verse 6 again. John says, 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. So John defines love not as a sentiment or an emotion, but as obedience to God's commandments. So once again, love is obedience to God's commandments.

[15 : 30] And those who are obedient to the truth is contained in God's commandments, which are otherwise known as the fundamentals of the faith, like we talked about earlier, are identified as people who are walking in love.

So after restating the commandment, John expresses a concern. And that concern then comes in verses 7 and 8. They say, For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh.

This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves that we do not lose those things we work for, but that we may receive a full reward. So one of the stumbling blocks to Christians is the many deceivers who subtly blur the truth about Jesus.

So how does John say that deceivers can blur the truth about Jesus? Notice the top of verse 7.

It says, They do not confess Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh. So one of the most common deceptions and denials about Jesus is that he is both fully God and fully man at the same time.

[16 : 43] And John himself spent a lot of his time writing and detailing that doctrine in his gospel. Because John 1, 1 through 18, introduced us to Jesus as the eternal word.

He manifested himself through his incarnation. So, turn over to John 1, 1 through 18. Look at John 1, 1 through 18 for just a minute. And we are going to look at a few verses that remind us of the true biblical doctrine about Christ.

What was it? So John 1. John 1. And then we will look at just a few verses there. The Gospel of John. John 1, 1 through 18.

Okay. And if we start in verse 1 and look at 1, 1 through 3. They say, In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made. So these verses show that Jesus is God and has always existed.

[17 : 48] Because after all, if Jesus had not always existed, he would have had to be created. And if Jesus himself were created, he couldn't have created all things.

Because if he was a created being that actually created all things, he would have had to be and not be at the same time. And that's kind of hard to do that. So you can see then that these verses show that Jesus is eternal because he created all things.

And then skip down to verse 14 of John 1. John 1, 14 says, And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

So he always was the eternal God, but then he became flesh when he came down to dwell among us. And John 1, 14 has a phrase that some stumble over, because that verse describes Jesus as the only begotten of the Father.

But the term only begotten there is really a mistranslation of the original Greek, because the word doesn't come from the meaning of beget, but instead it has the idea of being the only beloved one of the Father.

[19 : 01] So therefore it has the idea of being unique, or being beloved like no other. And by this word, John emphasized the exclusive character of the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Trinity.

So it doesn't connote origin, but rather unique prominence for Jesus. And if you want to see another example that shows that, it was also used of Isaac in Hebrews 11, 17, because we know Isaac was Abraham's second son.

But that verse in Hebrews 11, 17 refers to him as the only begotten son of Abraham. So the brief look into the Gospel of John then shows that the doctrine of Jesus being both fully God and fully man is a primary emphasis for John.

And if we go back to our text tonight, we still see John proclaiming this truth. So let's go back to 2 John now and pick up where we left off with verse 8. 2 John 8 says, Look to yourselves that we do not lose those things we work for, but that we may receive a full reward.

So because of the appearance of the deceivers, the readers needed to watch out for the disastrous spiritual effects which any compromise with their ideas could lead to. The danger there is not loss of salvation, but loss of reward.

[20 : 25] We know that God would not forget what they had done for him, but the fullness of their reward was threatened by the subversion of the Antichrist. So that leads us to the next section of the letter.

Then we've already seen the commandment and the concern. Now we'll see the caution. And the caution comes in verses 9 through 11 where John states his warning about the deceivers even more strongly.

9 through 11 say, 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.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him. For he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. So verse 9 has both a negative and a positive.

The negative comes in the first sentence where it says, Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. So a failure to be faithful then to the fundamental sound doctrines of the faith, which include the proper view of the person and work of Christ and also love and obedience to those doctrines, that marks a person as never having been born again in the first place.

[21 : 43] And the word abide has the idea of a continual adherence, and it warns that the fundamentals are not open to change or subject to the latest trends or fads that we have.

So the positive side of verse 9 then comes in its second sentence. That's where the verse says, He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. So this tells us that God is with those who persist in the true doctrine about Christ.

But John no doubt had more in mind than just being orthodox in the faith there, because for John, a person who continues in the teaching is one who abides or makes his home in those doctrines.

So that person's connection with the truth then is very vital and dynamic. So he's got a dynamic relationship with God whose commands he obeys. And of course we know that nobody obeys God's commands perfectly, but this refers to the pattern or the habitual nature of our lives.

So abiding then and obedience are inseparable when we look at it that way. And 2 John 9 should remind us of Jesus' words in John 8.31 that we looked at earlier.

[22 : 56] And remember John 8.31 is when Jesus said, If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. So let's read the last sentence of 2 John 9 together with verses 10 and 11.

They say, He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

So to really understand what John is telling us there, we need to put ourselves into the Greco-Roman world of John's day and understand what it was like when John wrote this letter.

And back in that day, a traveling philosopher or a religious teacher was a familiar sight in that world. And Christian preachers also traveled and relied on local believers for support and hospitality.

So John was saying that if someone comes without bringing sound doctrine, he should be refused help. And the word for bring there literally means to carry.

[24 : 00] So that continues the traveling motif that John had, because he's saying that the good doctrine should be part of that person's baggage and he should carry that with him wherever he goes.

And if he doesn't have good doctrine as part of his baggage, he should receive no hospitality from those who are loyal to the truth. Notice that he says, a deceiver is not even to be given a greeting of welcome.

So that's what goes into your blank there. A deceiver is not even to be given a greeting of welcome, because to do so would be to share in the deceiver's evil deeds.

So does that sound a little harsh to you at first? At first, you know, we may think that these verses seem inconsistent with John's command to love one another, because, you know, he tells us to love one another and now he's saying, don't even greet somebody who espouses incorrect doctrines.

But when we look at them a little deeper, we're going to see that the words are completely consistent with what John wrote earlier. So look back to verse 6 and see how John defined love.

[25:08] He says, This is love that we walk according to his commandments. So a couple of questions to consider here. Are we walking in God's commandments if we help false teachers promote incorrect doctrine about God?

It's kind of hard to walk in God's commandments if you're helping somebody say wrong things about God. And let's personalize it even more then, because when we personalize it more, we can actually understand why denying false teachers our hospitality actually is the most loving thing we can do.

Because if someone has an incorrect view of whom Jesus is, is that person really saved? So then are we being very loving to that person if we don't warn them that they're not truly saved and they need to repent and turn to Christ?

And that's really what John is driving at there. Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is point out to somebody where they're wrong and help them find the right path.

And Jesus gave us several examples of that himself because, you know, Jesus was hard on those people who had an incorrect view of him. And if you have any doubt about that, simply read Matthew 23 verses 1 through 36 at some point.

[26:29] And just to give you a taste of that section, we're only going to look at one verse. And that's Matthew 23 verse 13. It has the first of seven woes that Jesus declared against the scribes and the Pharisees.

And in Matthew 23 verse 13, Jesus said this. He said, But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

So that doesn't sound very loving when you hear that on the surface either, but he is warning them about the error of their ways. So that brings us to the last two verses then of 2 John where we see the conclusion of the letter.

So let's go ahead and read the conclusion. Having many things to write to you. Can I ask you something about, it says, Neither bid him Godspeed. What, what?

So one way to say that then where it says, Neither bid him Godspeed is to wish him well type thing. Okay. So it would be like saying, Well, I hope you find success in what you're doing. Because then if you ask him to find success in what he's doing, then you're actually helping promote his doctrine.

[27:42] Thank you. And of course we've got to be careful with that because we do need to tell people about the truth of Jesus and make sure we witness them, witness to them. But we've got to make sure also that when we do that we don't appear to be giving credence or support to what they believe.

So when they come off when the Mormons come knocking at your door? Yeah, so when the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses or those come knocking at your door, it's fine to show them the error of their ways and things like that.

You just want to be careful to make it sound, for example, that you believe their way is just as valid as the true way. Right. And that can be kind of a tough balance to find several times.

And of course, it was even harder in John's day because people just sort of expected that hospitality and people to open their homes up to them and things like that. So let's look at the conclusion then in verses 12 and 13.

They say, 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. The children of your elect sister greet you.

[28:52] Amen. So John said he had much to write to them, but he'd rather have face to face communications. And he expected to visit soon when he'd have more to say. And he also said that such a personal visit would make his joy complete.

So keep that in mind as we come to the application section here and really consider how this passage applies to us. The first three points that I'm going to talk about should be really obvious from what we've already discussed.

And the fourth one may take a little bit of an explanation. But the first one is just like John's initial readers, we are commanded to love one another. And we know that the command to love one another was obvious several times throughout the letter.

And then in verse 6, we see the second thing about the application. Love actually means walking in God's commandments. So love means walking in God's commandments.

And then the third one is what we just talked about is that love requires discernment. We want to be very loving to people always and be kind to people, but sometimes the most kind thing we can do is point out the error of their ways to try to get them on the right path.

[30:05] And then the fourth one that may require a little bit of explanation is that obedience produces joy. And I get that from verses 3 and verse 12.

So obedience produces joy. And the reason why obedience produces joy is that when believers uphold the biblical standards for fellowship, the result is genuine joy among those believers because the truths of the word are maintained then.

And another reason that obedience produces joy is that when we are obedient, we enjoy the full benefits of the promise in verse 3. And that's what he's getting at a little bit in verse 12 when he says that he wants to visit them so that their joy may be full.

And of course, when we enjoy the full benefits of the promise in verse 3, we get that grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father in truth and love.

And it really doesn't get any better than that.